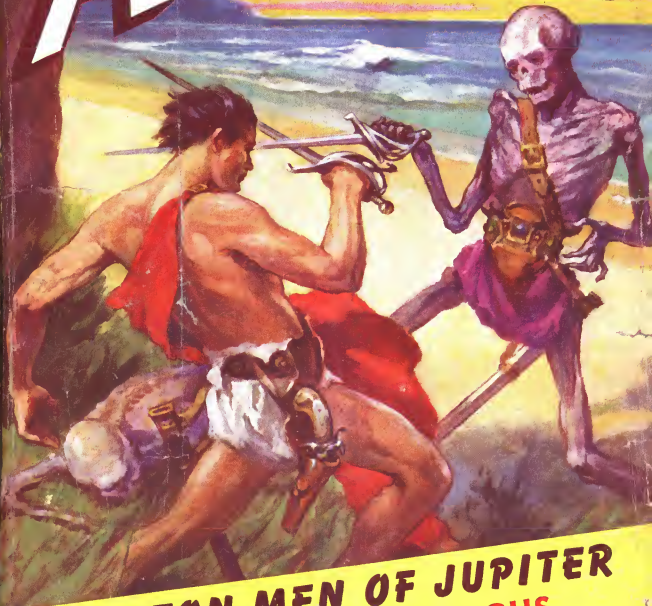


THE NEW ADAM by Stanley G. Weinbaum

VOLUME 17
NUMBER 2

SEE
BACK
COVER

AMAZING STORIES



SKELETON MEN OF JUPITER
BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

FEBRUARY

25c

AMAZING STORIES

FEBRUARY
1943



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At the First Sign of Trouble

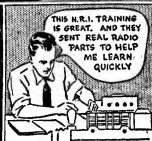
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THANKS

OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING



**TOM SAID
"NO"**
HE'S STILL
WAITING
FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND - SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE - I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO



GUESS I'M A FAILURE - LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

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» STORIES «

- SKELETON MEN OF JUPITER (Novel)**.....by Edgar Rice Burroughs... 8
Across space came horrible invaders, and John Carter of Mars faced them, his mighty sword in hand.
- VISITOR TO EARTH (Short)**.....by P. F. Costello..... 48
If you saw an ad in the paper about a secret weapon for sale, you'd do as this reporter did!
- THE NEW ADAM (Serial—Pt. I)**.....by Stanley G. Weinbaum.. 62
Edmond was to Man as Man is to the apes; but there was only Man's world in which to live—and love!
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A weird glowing ghost of a truck swept down Scraghorn mountain—and Death struck again and again!
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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John illustrating a scene from "Skeleton Men Of Jupiter"

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul illustrating "Stories Of The Stars"

Illustrations by J. Allen St. John, Virgil Finlay, Ned Hadley, Magorian, Hadden, Robert Fuqua, Rod Ruth, Joe Sewell

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AMAZING
STORIES
February
1943

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Volume 17
Number 2



KNOWLEDGE
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ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

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WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others? Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

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The OBSERVATORY

by THE Editor

GLANCING over this issue, your editor has decided that it would be a good idea for you readers to get out a red pencil and circle the month of February, 1943, as a month to remember for a long time—simply because it'll be the month you'll say: "The editor went all-out on this one." Which we certainly did! Cast your eye down the contents page, and see!

FIRST (naturally!) is the yarn you've all been yelling for . . . the first of a new series . . . by Edgar Rice Burroughs. "Skeleton Men of Jupiter" is another John Carter of Mars story. We don't see exactly what we can add to that statement to do anything further toward persuading you to read it—because obviously, nothing more need be said. Besides, the cover by St. John ought already to have suggested plenty to you!

NEXT is our first reprint (and not really a reprint because it never appeared in magazine form before) since we decided to run famous stories of the past. It is the finest of the fine stories written by the late Stanley G. Weinbaum, "The New Adam." This is a complete novel, and will be presented to you in two instalments. The first part of the serial is in this issue. Virgil Finlay is the illustrator, and he's done a job that will make you tingle to your toes with delight.

INCIDENTALLY, the illustration on page 91 is available to you readers, printed on fine enameled stock, suitable for framing, for the sum of 15c to cover the cost of reproduction, handling, and mailing. We think you'll agree instantly that here is an illustration you will be proud to hang on your wall. But don't delay!

FOR those of you who liked Leroy Yerxa's "Death Rides at Night," about those super-colossal trucks, this issue contains the sequel to that story, about even more super-colossal trucks. It's "Phantom Transport" and your editors waded out into deep water and emphatically declare that the lad has something here. You can write and disagree if you want to, but we'll ignore your comments, throw the letter in the wastebasket, because, brother, you'll be wrong!

SPEAKING of newcomers, we introduce Harry Jenkins this month. He's done a clever little thing called "A Pawn for a King." It's about a chess-playing robot, and contrary to the usual corn written about chess-playing robots, this robot isn't any world beater at the game. Why, even your editor could beat him! At chess . . .!

TARLETON FISKE is a newcomer to our pages too. He's done a weirdy that makes our skin crawl. Why not pile into bed tonight, use only your reading lamp, and read this one. It'll give your goosepimples some exercise—and besides, you'll enjoy a heck of a good story!

"ARD of the Sunset People" is one of those Stanton A. Coblentz yarns that you've come to expect. We don't mean it's any "formula" yarn. Quite the contrary. Coblentz dishes one out this time that isn't going to hurt his reputation!

SOLDIER DWIGHT V. SWAIN still graces our pages with manuscripts written before Uncle Sam snatched him into the army, and we know you'll like the yarn he's done for this issue. It is one of those stories written around a Magarian illustration, and both the pics and the story are plenty swell!

WE might as well complete the lineup by telling you P. F. Costello brings a "Visitor to Earth." Reader, meet Costello's "visitor"; Visitor, meet the reader. The rest is up to you—and we think you'll have a nice time together.

ON our back cover we present the first of a new series by Frank R. Paul, featuring the constellations. This one about Canis Major, the famous great dog. You'll find that Paul has given the astronomical picture of the constellation and Morris J. Steele has elaborated on it in his accompanying article. The painting itself depicts artist Paul's imaginary concept of the civilization that might exist on a world of this distant system. It should prove to be a very interesting and entertaining series to you. Incidentally, we will alter-

(Continued on page 142)

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SKELETON MEN



From distant Jupiter came a weird band of abductors, the first move in an evil plan for the subjugation of Mars.

OF JUPITER

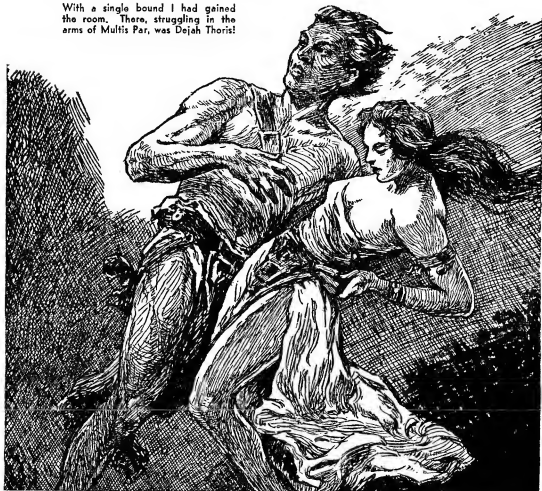
by Edgar Rice Burroughs

I AM no scientist. I am a fighting man. My most beloved weapon is the sword, and during a long life I have seen no reason to alter my theories as to its proper application to the many problems with which I have been faced. This is not true of the scientists. They are constantly abandoning one theory for another one. The law of gravita-

tion is about the only theory that has held throughout my lifetime—and if the earth should suddenly start rotating seventeen times faster than it now does, even the law of gravitation would fail us and we would all go sailing off into space.

Theories come and theories go—scientific theories. I recall that there

With a single bound I had gained the room. There, struggling in the arms of Multis Par, was Dejah Thoris!



was once a theory that Time and Space moved forward constantly in a straight line. There was also a theory that neither Time nor Space existed—it was all in your mind's eye. Then came the theory that Time and Space curved in upon themselves. Tomorrow, some scientist may show us reams and reams of paper and hundreds of square feet of blackboard covered with equations, formulae, signs, symbols, and diagrams to prove that Time and Space curve out away from themselves. Then our theoretic universe will come tumbling about our ears, and we shall have to start all over again from scratch.

Like many fighting men, I am inclined to be credulous concerning matters outside my vocation; or at least I used to be. I believed whatever the scientists said. Long ago, I believed with Flammarion that Mars was habitable and inhabited; then a newer and more reputable school of scientists convinced me that it was neither. Without losing hope, I was yet forced to believe them until I came to Mars to live. They still insist that Mars is neither habitable nor inhabited, but I live here. Fact and theory seem to be opposed. Unquestionably, the scientists appear to be correct in theory. Equally incontrovertible is it that I am correct in fact.

In the adventure that I am about to narrate, fact and theory will again cross swords. I hate to do this to my long-suffering scientific friends; but if they would only consult me first rather than dogmatically postulating theories which do not meet with popular acclaim, they would save themselves much embarrassment.

DEJAH THORIS, my incomparable princess, and I were sitting upon a carved ersite bench in one of the gardens of our palace in Lesser Helium when an officer in the leather of Tardos

Mors, Jeddak of Helium, approached and saluted.

"From Tardos Mors to John Carter, kaor!" he said. "The jeddak requests your immediate presence in the Hall of Jeddaks in the imperial palace in Greater Helium."

"At once," I replied.

"May I fly you over, sir?" he asked. "I came in a two seater."

"Thanks," I replied. "I'll join you at the hangar in a moment." He saluted and left us.

"Who was he?" asked Dejah Thoris. "I don't recall ever having seen him before."

"Probably one of the new officers from Zor, whom Tardos Mors has commissioned in the Jeddak's Guard. It was a gesture of his, made to assure Zor that he has the utmost confidence in the loyalty of that city and as a measure for healing old wounds."

Zor, which lies about three hundred eighty miles southeast of Helium, is one of the more recent conquests of Helium and had given us a great deal of trouble in the past because of treasonable acts instigated by a branch of its royal family led by one Multis Par, a prince. About five years before the events I am about to narrate occurred, this Multis Par had disappeared; and since then Zor had given us no trouble. No one knew what had become of the man, and it was supposed that he had either taken the last, long voyage down the river Iss to the Lost Sea of Korus in the Valley Dor or had been captured and murdered by members of some horde of savage Green men. Nor did anyone appear to care—just so he never returned to Zor, where he was thoroughly hated for his arrogance and cruelty.

"I hope that my revered grandfather does not keep you long," said Dejah Thoris. "We are having a few guests

for dinner tonight, and I do not wish you to be late."

"A few!" I said. "How many? two hundred or three hundred?"

"Don't be impossible," she said, laughing. "Really, only a few."

"A thousand, if it pleases you, my dear," I assured her as I kissed her. "And now, good-by! I'll doubtless be back within the hour." That was a year ago!

As I ran up the ramp toward the hangar on the palace roof, I had, for some then unaccountable reason, a sense of impending ill; but I attributed it to the fact that my *tete-a-tete* with my princess had been interrupted.

The thin air of dying Mars renders the transition from day to night startlingly sudden to an earthman. Twilight is of short duration owing to the negligible refraction of the sun's rays. When I had left *Dejah Thoris*, the sun, though low, was still shining; the garden was in shadow, but it was still daylight. When I stepped from the head of the ramp to that part of the roof of the palace where the hangar was located which housed the private fliers of the family, dim twilight partially obscured my vision. It would soon be dark. I wondered why the hangar guard had not switched on the lights.

In the very instant that I realized that something was amiss, a score of men surrounded and overpowered me before I could draw and defend myself. A voice cautioned me to silence. It was the voice of the man who had summoned me into this trap. When the others spoke, it was in a language I had never heard before. They spoke in dismal, hollow monotone—expressionless, sepulchral.

THEY had thrown me face down upon the pavement and trussed my

wrists behind my back. Then they jerked me roughly to my feet. Now, for the first time, I obtained a fairly good sight of my captors. I was appalled. I could not believe my own eyes. These things were not men. They were human skeletons! Black eye sockets looked out from grinning skulls. Bony, skeletal fingers grasped my arms. It seemed to me that I could see every bone in each body. Yet the things were alive! They moved. They spoke. They dragged me toward a strange craft that I had not before noticed. It lay in the shadow of the hangar—long, lean, sinister. It looked like an enormous projectile, with rounded nose and tapering tail.

In the first brief glance I had of it, I saw fins forward below its median line, a long, longitudinal aileron (or so I judged it to be) running almost the full length of the ship, and strangely designed elevator and rudder as part of the empennage assembly. I saw no propellers; but then I had little time for a close examination of the strange craft, as I was quickly hustled through a doorway in its metal side.

The interior was pitch dark. I could see nothing other than the faint light of the dying day visible through long, narrow portholes in the ship's side.

The man who had betrayed me followed me into the ship with my captors. The door was closed and securely fastened; then the ship rose silently into the night. No light showed upon it, within or without. However, I was certain that one of our patrol ships must see it; then, if nothing more, my people would have a clew upon which to account for my disappearance; and before dawn a thousand ships of the navy of Helium would be scouring the surface of Barsoom and the air above it in search of me, nor could any ship the size of this find hiding place wherein

to elude them.

Once above the city, the lights of which I could see below us, the craft shot away at appalling speed. Nothing upon Barsoom could have hoped to overhaul it. It moved at great speed and in utter silence. The cabin lights were switched on. I was disarmed and my hands were freed. I looked with revulsion, almost with horror, upon the twenty or thirty creatures which surrounded me.

I saw now that they were not skeletons, though they still closely resembled the naked bones of dead men. Parchmentlike skin was stretched tightly over the bony structure of the skull. There seemed to be neither cartilage nor fat underlying it. What I had thought were hollow eye sockets were deep set brown eyes showing no whites. The skin of the face merged with what should have been gums at the roots of the teeth, which were fully exposed in both jaws, precisely as are the teeth of a naked skull. The nose was but a gaping hole in the center of the face. There were no external ears—only the orifices—nor was there any hair upon any of the exposed parts of their bodies nor upon their heads. The things were even more hideous than the hideous kaldanes of Bantoom—those horrifying spider men into whose toils fell Tara of Helium during that adventure which led her to the country of The Chessmen of Mars; they, at least, had beautiful bodies, even though they were not their own.

The bodies of my captors harmonized perfectly with their heads—parchmentlike skin covered the bones of their limbs so tightly that it was difficult to convince ones self that it was not true bone that was exposed. And so tightly was this skin drawn over their torsos that every rib and every vertebra stood out in plain and disgusting relief. When

they stood directly in front of a bright light, I could see their internal organs.

They wore no clothing other than a G string. Their harness was quite similar to that which we Barsoomians wear, which is not at all remarkable, since it was designed to serve the same purpose—supporting a sword, a dagger, and a pocket pouch.

Disgusted, I turned away from them to look down upon the moon bathed surface of my beloved Mars. But where was it! Close to port was Cluros, the farther moon! I caught a glimpse of its surface as we flashed by. Fourteen thousand five hundred miles in a little more than a minute! I was incredible.

The red man who had engineered my capture came and sat down beside me. His rather handsome face was sad. "I am sorry, John Carter," he said. "Perhaps, if you will permit me to explain, you will at least understand why I did it. I do not expect that you will ever forgive me."

"Where is this ship taking me?" I demanded.

"To Sasoom," he said.

Sasoom! That is the Barsoomian name for Jupiter—three hundred and forty-two million miles from the palace where my Dejah Thoris awaited me!

CHAPTER II

FOR some time I sat in silence, gazing out into the inky black void of space, a Stygian backdrop against which stars and planets shone with intense brilliancy, steady and untwinkling. To port or starboard, above, below, the heavens stared at me with unblinking eyes—millions of white hot, penetrating eyes. Many questions harassed my mind. Had I been especially signalled out for capture? If so, why? How had this large ship been able to enter Helium and settle upon my landing stage in

broad daylight? Who was this sad faced, apologetic man who had led me into such a trap? He could have nothing against me personally. Never, before he had stepped into my garden, had I seen him.

It was he who broke the silence. It was as though he had read my thoughts. "You wonder why you are here, John Carter," he said. "If you will bear with me, I shall tell you. In the first place, let me introduce myself. I am U Dan, formerly a padwar in the guard of Zu Tith, the jed of Zor who was killed in battle when Helium overthrew his tyrannical reign and annexed the city.

"My sympathies were all upon the side of Helium, and I saw a brilliant and happy future for my beloved city once she was a part of the great Helium-etic empire. I fought against Helium; because it was my sworn duty to defend the jed I loathed—a monster of tyranny and cruelty—but when the war was over, I gladly swore allegiance to Tardos Mors, jeddak of Helium.

"I had been raised in the palace of the jed in utmost intimacy with the members of the royal family. I knew them all well, especially Multis Par, the prince, who, in the natural course of events, would have succeeded to the throne. He was of a kind with his father, Zu Tith—arrogant, cruel, tyrannical by nature. After the fall of Zor, he sought to foment discord and arouse the people to revolt. When he failed, he disappeared. That was about five years ago.

"Another member of the royal family whom I knew well was as unlike Zu Tith and Multis Par as day is unlike night. Her name is Vaja. She is a cousin of Multis Par. I loved her and she loved me. We were to have been married, when, about two years after the disappearance of Multis Par, Vaja mysteriously disappeared."

I DID not understand why he was telling me all this. I was certainly not interested in his love affair. I was not interested in him. I was still less interested, if possible, in Multis Par; but I listened.

"I searched," he continued. "The governor of Zor gave me every assistance within his power, but all to no avail. Then, one night, Multis Par entered my quarters when I was alone. He wasted no time. He came directly to the point.

"I suppose," he said, "that you are wondering what has become of Vaja."

"I knew then that he had been instrumental in her abduction; and I feared the worst, for I knew the type of man he was. I whipped out my sword. 'Where is she?' I demanded. 'Tell me, if you care to live.'

"He only laughed at me. 'Don't be a fool,' he said. 'If you kill me you will never see her again. You will never even know where she is. Work with me, and you may have her back. But you will have to work fast, as I am becoming very fond of her. It is odd,' he added reminiscently, 'that I could have lived for years in the same palace with her and have been blind to her many charms, both mental and physical—especially physical.'

"Where is she?" I demanded. "If you have harmed her, you beast—"

"Don't call names, U Dan," he said. "If you annoy me too greatly I may keep her for myself and enlist the services of some one other than you to assist me with the plan I had come to explain to you. I thought you would be more sensible. You used to be a very sensible man; but then, of course, love plays strange tricks upon one's mental processes. I am commencing to find that out in my own case." He gave a nasty little laugh. "But don't worry," he continued. "She is quite

safe—so far. How much longer she will be safe depends wholly upon you.’

“‘Where is she?’ I demanded.

“‘Where you can never get her without my help,’ he replied.

“‘If she is anywhere upon all Barsoom, I shall find her,’ I said.

“‘She is not on Barsoom. She is on Sasoom.’

“‘You lie, Multis Par,’ I said.

“He shrugged, indifferently. ‘Perhaps you will believe her,’ he said, and handed me a letter. It was indeed from Vaja. I recall its message word for word:

“‘Incredible as it may seem to you, I am a prisoner on Sasoom. Multis Par has promised to bring you here to me if you will perform what he calls a small favor for him. I do not know what he is going to ask of you; but unless it can be honorably done, do not do it. I am safe and unharmed.’

“‘What is it you wish me to do?’ I asked.

“‘I shall not attempt to quote his exact words; but this, in effect, is what he told me: Multis Par’s disappearance from Zor was caused by his capture by men from Sasoom. For some time they had been coming to this planet, reconnoitering, having in mind the eventual conquest of Barsoom.

“‘I asked him for what reason, and he explained that it was simply because they were a warlike race. Their every thought was of war, as it had been for ages until the warlike spirit was as compelling as the urge for self-preservation. They had conquered all other peoples upon Sasoom and sought a new world to conquer.

“‘They had captured him to learn what they could of the armaments and military effectiveness of various Barsoomian nations, and had decided that as Helium was the most powerful, it would be Helium upon which they

would descend. Helium once disposed of, the rest of Barsoom would, they assumed, be easy to conquer.”

“And where do I come in in this scheme of theirs?” I asked.

“I am coming to that,” said U Dan. “The Morgors are a thorough-going and efficient people. They neglect no littlest detail which might effect the success or failure of a campaign. They already have excellent maps of Barsoom and considerable data relative to the fleets and armament of the principal nations. They now wish to check this data and obtain full information as to the war technique of the Heliumites. This they expect to get from you. This they will get from you.”

I smiled. “Neither they nor you rate the honor and loyalty of a Heliumite very highly.”

A SAD smile crossed his lips. “I know how you feel,” he said. “I felt the same way—until they captured Vaja and her life became the price of my acquiescence. Only to save her did I agree to act as a decoy to aid in your capture. The Morgors are adepts in individual and mass psychology as well as in the art of war.”

“These things are Morgors?” I asked, nodding in the direction of some of the repulsive creatures. U Dan nodded. “I can appreciate the position in which you have been placed,” I said, “but the Morgors have no such hold on me.”

“Wait,” said U Dan.

“What do you mean?” I demanded.

“Just wait. They will find a way. They are fiends. No one could have convinced me before Multis Par came to me with his proposition that I could have been forced to betray a man whom I, with all decent men, admire as I have admired you, John Carter. Perhaps I was wrong, but when I learned that

Vaja would be tortured and mutilated after Multis Par had had his way with her and even then not be allowed to die but kept for future torture, I weakened and gave in. I do not expect you to forgive, but I hope that you will understand."

"I do understand," I said. "Perhaps, under like circumstances, I should have done the same thing." I could see how terribly the man's conscience tortured him. I could see that he was essentially a man of honor. I could forgive him for the thing that he had done for an innocent creature whom he loved, but could he expect me to betray my country, betray my whole world, to save a woman I had never seen. Still, I was bothered. Frankly, I did not know what I should do when faced with the final decision. "At least," I said, "should I ever be situated as you were, I could appear to comply while secretly working to defeat their ends."

"It was thus that I thought," he said. "It is still the final shred by which I cling to my self-respect. Perhaps, before it is too late, I may still be able to save both Vaja and yourself."

"Perhaps we can work together to that end and to the salvation of Helium," I said; "though I am really not greatly worried about Helium. I think she can take care of herself."

He shook his head. "Not if a part, even, of what Multis Par has told me is true. They will come in thousands of these ships, invisible to the inhabitants of Barsoom. Perhaps two million of them will invade Helium and overrun her two principal cities before a single inhabitant is aware that a single enemy threatens their security. They will come with lethal weapons of which Barsoomians know nothing and which they cannot, therefore, combat."

"Invisible ships!" I exclaimed. "Why, I saw this one plainly after I

was captured."

"Yes," he said. "It was not invisible then, but it was invisible when it came in broad daylight under the bows of your patrol ships and landed in one of the most prominent places in all Lesser Helium. It was not invisible when you first saw it; because it had cast off its invisibility, or, rather, the Morgors had cast it off so that they might find it again themselves, for otherwise it would have been as invisible to them as to us."

"Do you know how they achieve this invisibility?" I asked.

"Multis Par has explained it to me," replied U Dan. "Let me see; I am not much of a scientist, but I think that I recall more or less correctly what he told me. It seems that on some of the ocean beaches on Sasoom there is a sub-microscopic, magnetic sand composed of prismatic crystals. When the Morgors desire invisibility for a ship, they magnetize the hull; and then, from countless tiny apertures in the hull, they coat the whole exterior of the ship with these prismatic crystals. They simply spray them out, and they settle in a cloud upon the hull, causing light rays to bend around the ship. The instant that the hull is demagnetized, these tiny particles, light as air, fall or are blown off; and instantly the ship is visible again."

Here, a Morgor approached and interrupted our conversation. His manner was arrogant and rude. I could not understand his words, as he spoke his own language in the hollow, graveyard tones I had previously noticed. U Dan replied in the same language but in a less lugubrious tone of voice; then he turned to me.

"Your education is to commence at once," he said, with a wry smile.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"During this voyage you are to learn

the language of the Morgors," he explained.

"How long is the voyage going to last?" I asked. "It takes about three months to learn a language well enough to understand and make yourself understood."

"The voyage will take about eighteen days, as we shall have to make a detour of some million miles to avoid the Asteroids. They happen to lie directly in our way."

"I am supposed to learn their language in eighteen days?" I asked.

"You are not only supposed to, but you will," replied U Dan.

CHAPTER III

MY education commenced. It was inconceivably brutal, but most effective. My instructors worked on me in relays, scarcely giving me time to eat or sleep. U Dan assisted as interpreter, which was immensely helpful to me, as was the fact that I am exceedingly quick in picking up new languages. Sometimes I was so overcome by lack of sleep that my brain lagged and my responses were slow and inaccurate. Upon one such occasion, the Morgor who was instructing me slapped my face. I had put up with everything else; because I was so very anxious to learn their language—a vital necessity if I were ever to hope to cope with them and thwart their fantastic plan of conquest. But I could not put up with that. I hit the fellow a single blow that sent him entirely across the cabin, but I almost broke my hand against his unpadded, bony jaw.

He did not get up. He lay where he had fallen. Several of his fellows came for me with drawn swords. The situation looked bad, as I was unarmed. U Dan was appalled. Fortunately for me, the officer in command of the ship

had been attracted by the commotion and appeared at the scene of action in time to call his men off. He demanded an explanation.

I had now mastered sufficient words of their language so that I could understand almost everything that was said to me and make myself understood by them, after a fashion. I told the fellow that I had been starved and deprived of sleep and had not complained, but that no man could strike me without suffering the consequences.

"And no creature of a lower order may strike a Morgor without suffering the consequences," he replied.

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

"I am going to do nothing about it," he replied. "My orders require me to bring you alive to Eurobus. When I have done that and reported your behavior, it will lie wholly within the discretion of Bandolian as to what your punishment shall be;" then he walked away, but food was brought me and I was allowed to sleep; nor did another Morgor strike me during the remainder of the voyage.

While I was eating, I asked U Dan what Eurobus was. "It is their name for the planet Sasoom," he replied.

"And who is Bandolian?"

"Well, I suppose he would be called a jeddak on Barsoom. I judge this from the numerous references I have heard them make concerning him. Anyhow, he seems to be an object of fear if not veneration."

After a long sleep, I was much refreshed. Everything that I had been taught was clear again in my mind, no longer dulled by exhaustion. It was then that the commander took it upon himself to examine me personally. I am quite sure that he did so for the sole purpose of finding fault with me and perhaps punishing me. He was ex-

tremely nasty and arrogant. His simplest questions were at first couched in sarcastic language; but finally, evidently disappointed, he left me. I was given no more instruction.

"You have done well," said U Dan. "You have, in a very short time, mastered their language well enough to suit them."

This was the fifteenth day. During the last three days they left me alone. Travelling through space is stupefyingly monotonous. I had scarcely glanced from the portholes for days. This was, however, principally because my time was constantly devoted to instruction; but now, with nothing else to do, I glanced out. A most gorgeous scene presented itself to my astonished eyes. Gorgeous Jupiter loomed before me in all his majestic immensity. Five of his moons were plainly visible in the heavens. I could even see the tiny one closest to him, which is only thirty miles in diameter. During the ensuing two days, I saw, or at least I thought I saw, all of the remaining five moons. And Jupiter grew larger and more imposing. We were approaching him at the very considerable speed of twenty-three miles per second, but were still some two million miles distant.

FREED from the monotony of language lessons, my mind was once more enslaved to my curiosity. How could life exist upon a planet which one school of scientific thought claimed to have a surface temperature of two hundred and sixty degrees below zero and which another school was equally positive was still in a half molten condition and so hot that gases rose as hot vapor into its thick, warm atmosphere to fall as incessant rain? How could human life exist in an atmosphere made up largely of ammonia and methane gases? And what of the effect of the

planet's terrific gravitational pull? Would my legs be able to support my weight? If I fell down, would I be able to rise again?

Another question, which presented itself to my mind, related to the motive power which had been carrying us through space at terrific speed for seventeen days. I asked U Dan if he knew.

"They utilize the Eighth Barsoomian Ray, what we know as the ray of propulsion, in combination with the highly concentrated gravitational forces of all celestial bodies within the range of whose attraction the ship passes, and a concentration of Ray L (cosmic rays) which are collected from space and discharged at high velocities from propulsion tubes at the ship's stern. The Eighth Barsoomian Ray helps to give the ship initial velocity upon leaving a planet and as a brake to its terrific speed when approaching its landing upon another. Gravitational forces are utilized both to accelerate speed and to guide the ship. The secret of their success with these inter-planetary ships lies in the ingenious methods they have developed for concentrating these various forces and directing their tremendous energies."

"Thanks, U Dan," I said, "I think I grasp the general idea. It would certainly surprise some of my scientific friends on earth."

My passing reference to scientists started me to thinking of the vast accumulation of theories I was about to see shattered when I landed on Jupiter within the next twenty-four hours. It certainly must be habitable for a race quite similar to our own. These people had lungs, a heart, kidneys, a liver, and other internal organs similar to our own. I knew this for a fact, as I could see them every time one of the Morgors stood between me and a bright light, so thin and transparent was the

parchmentlike skin that stretched tightly over their frames. Once more the scientists would be wrong. I felt sorry for them. They have been wrong so many times and had to eat humble pie. There were those scientists, for instance, who clung to the Ptolemaic System of the universe; and who, after Galileo had discovered four of the moons of Jupiter in 1610, argued that such pretended discoveries were absurd, their argument being that since we have seven openings in the head—two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, and a mouth, there could be in the heavens but seven planets. Having dismissed Galileo's absurd pretensions in this scientific manner, they caused him to be thrown into jail.

When at a distance of about five hundred thousand miles from Jupiter, the ship began to slow down very gradually in preparation for a landing; and some three or four hours later we entered the thick cloud envelope which surrounds the planet. We were barely crawling along now at not more than six hundred miles an hour.

I was all eagerness to see the surface of Jupiter; and extremely impatient of the time that it took the ship to traverse the envelope, in which we could see absolutely nothing.

AT LAST we broke through, and what a sight was revealed to my astonished eyes! A great world lay below me, illuminated by a weird red light which seemed to emanate from the inner surface of the cloud envelope, shedding a rosy glow over mountain, hill, dale, plain, and ocean. At first I could in no way account for this all pervading illumination; but presently, my eyes roving over the magnificent panorama lying below me, I saw in the distance an enormous volcano, from which giant flames billowed upward thousands of

feet into the air. As I was to learn later, the crater of this giant was a full hundred miles in diameter and along the planet's equator there stretched a chain of these Gargantuan torches for some thirty thousand miles, while others were dotted over the entire surface of the globe, giving both light and heat to a world that would have been dark and cold without them.

As we dropped lower, I saw what appeared to be cities, all located at a respectful distance from these craters. In the air, I saw several ships similar to that which had brought me from Mars. Some were very small; others were much larger than the one with which I had become so familiar. Two small ships approached us, and we slowed down almost to a stop. They were evidently patrol ships. From several ports guns were trained on us. One of the ships lay at a little distance; the other came alongside. Our commander raised a hatch in the upper surface of the ship above the control room and stuck his head out. A door in the side of the patrol ship opened, and an officer appeared. The two exchanged a few words; then the commander of the patrol ship saluted and closed the door in which he had appeared. We were free to proceed. All this had taken place at an altitude of some five thousand feet.

We now spiraled down slowly toward a large city. Later, I learned that it covered an area of about four hundred square miles. It was entirely walled, and the walls and buildings were of a uniform dark brown color, as were the pavements of the avenues. It was a dismal, repellent city built entirely of volcanic rock. Within its boundaries I could see no sign of vegetation—not a patch of sward, not a shrub, not a tree; no color to relieve the monotony of somber brown.

The city was perfectly rectangular,

having a long axis of about twenty-five miles and a width of about sixteen. The avenues were perfectly straight and equidistant, one from the other, cutting the city into innumerable, identical square blocks. The buildings were all perfect rectangles, though not all of either the same size or height—the only break in the depressing monotony of this gloomy city.

Well, not the only break; there were open spaces where there were no buildings—perhaps plazas or parade grounds. But these I did not notice until we had dropped quite low above the city, as they were all paved with the same dark brown rock. The city was quite as depressing in appearance as is Salt Lake City from the air on an overcast February day. The only relief from this insistent sense of gloom was the rosy light which pervaded the scene, the reflection of the flames of the great volcanoes from the inner surface of the cloud envelope; this and the riotous growth of tropical verdure beyond the city's walls—weird, unearthly growths of weird, unearthly hues.

ACCOMPANIED by the two patrol ships, we now dropped gently into a large open space near the center of the city, coming to rest close to a row of hangars in which were many craft similar to our own.

We were immediately surrounded by a detail of warriors; and, much to my surprise, I saw a number of human beings much like myself in appearance, except that their skins were purple. These were unarmed and quite naked except for G strings, having no harness such as is worn by the Morgors. As soon as we had disembarked, these people ran the ship into the hangar. They were slaves.

There were no interchanges of greetings between the returning Morgors

and those who had come out to meet the ship. The two commanding officers saluted one another and exchanged a few routine military brevities. The commander of our ship gave his name, which was Haglion, the name of his ship, and stated that he was returning from Mars—he called it Garobus. Then he detailed ten of his own men to accompany him as guards for U Dan and me. They surrounded us, and we walked from the landing field in the wake of Haglion.

He led us along a broad avenue filled with pedestrian and other traffic. On the sidewalks there were only Morgors. The purple people walked in the gutters. Many Morgors were mounted on enormous, repulsive looking creatures with an infinite number of legs. They reminded me of huge centipedes, their bodies being jointed similarly, each joint being about eighteen inches long. Their heads were equipped with many long, sharp teeth. Like nearly all the land animals of Jupiter, as I was to learn later, they were ungulate, hoofs evidently being rendered necessary by the considerable areas of hardened lava on the surface of the planet, as well as by the bits of lava rock which permeate the soil.

These creatures were sometimes of great length, seating as high as ten or twelve Morgors on their backs. There were other beasts of burden on the avenue. They were of strange, unearthly forms; but I shall not bore you by describing them here.

Above this traffic moved small fliers in both directions. Thus the avenue accommodated a multitude of people, strange, dour people who seldom spoke and, as far as I had seen, never laughed. They might have, as indeed they looked, risen from sad graves to rattle their bones in mock life in a cemetery city of the dead.

U Dan and I walked in the gutter, a guard on the sidewalk close beside each of us. We were not good enough to walk where the Morgors walked! Haglion led us to a large plaza surrounded by buildings of considerable size, but of no beauty. A few of them boasted towers—some squat, some tall, all ugly. They looked as though they had been built to endure throughout the ages.

We were conducted to one of these buildings, before the entrance to which a single sentry stood. Haglion spoke to him, and he summoned an officer from the interior of the building, after which we all entered. Our names and a description of each of us were entered in a large book. Haglion was given a receipt for us, after which he and our original escort left.

Our new custodian issued instructions to several warriors who were in the room, and they hustled U Dan and me down a spiral stairway to a dim basement, where we were thrown into a gloomy cell. Our escort locked the door on us and departed.

CHAPTER IV

ALTHOUGH I had often wondered about Jupiter, I had never hoped nor cared to visit it because of the inhospitable conditions which earthly scientists assure us pertain to this great planet. However, here I was, and conditions were not at all as the scientists had described. Unquestionably, the mass of Jupiter is far greater than that of earth or Mars, yet I felt the gravitational pull far less than I had upon earth. It was even less than that which I had experienced upon Mars. This was due, I realized, to the rapid revolution of the planet upon its axis. Centrifugal force, tending to throw me off into space, more than outweighed the increased force of gravitation. I had

never before felt so light upon my feet. I was intrigued by contemplation of the height and distances to which I might jump.

The cell in which I found myself, while large, precluded any experiments along that line. It was a large room of hard, brown lava rock. A few white lights set in recesses in the ceiling gave meager illumination. From the center of one wall a little stream of water tinkled into a small cavity in the floor, the overflow being carried off by a gutter through a small hole in the end wall of the cell. There were some grass mats on the floor. These constituted the sole furnishings of the bleak prison.

"The Morgors are thoughtful hosts," I remarked to U Dan. "They furnish water for drinking and bathing. They have installed sewage facilities. They have given us whereon to lie or sit. Our cell is lighted. It is strong. We are secure against the attacks of our enemies. However, as far as the Morgors are concerned, I—"

"S-s-sh!" cautioned U Dan. "We are not alone." He nodded toward the far end of the cell. I looked, and for the first time perceived what appeared to be the figure of a man stretched upon a mat.

Simultaneously, it arose and came toward us. It was, indeed, a man. "You need have no fear of me," he said. "Say what you please of the Morgors. You could not possibly conceive any terms of opprobrium in which to describe them more virulent than those which I have long used and considered inadequate."

Except that the man's skin was a light blue, I could not see that he differed materially in physical appearance from U Dan and myself. His body, which was almost naked, was quite hairless except for a heavy growth on his head and for eyebrows and eye-

lashes. He spoke the same language as the Morgors. U Dan and I had been conversing in the universal language of Barsoom. I was surprised that the man had been able to understand us. U Dan and I were both silent for a moment.

"Perhaps," suggested our cell mate, "you do not understand the language of Eurobus—eh?"

"We do," I said, "but we were surprised that you understood our language."

THE fellow laughed. "I did not," he said. "You mentioned the Morgors, so I knew that you were speaking of them; and then, when your companion discovered me, he warned you to silence; so I guessed that you were saying something uncomplimentary about our captors. Tell me—who are you? You are no Morgors, nor do you look like us Savators."

"We are from Barsoom," I said.

"The Morgors call it Garobus," explained U Dan.

"I have heard of it," said the Savator. "It is a world that lies far above the clouds. The Morgors are going to invade it. I suppose they have captured you either to obtain information from you or to hold you as hostages."

"For both purposes, I imagine," said U Dan. "Why are you imprisoned?"

"I accidentally bumped into a Morgor who was crossing an avenue at an intersection. He struck me and I knocked him down. For that, I shall be destroyed at the graduation exercises of the next class."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"The education of the Morgor youth consists almost wholly of subjects and exercises with the art of war. Because it is spectacular, because it arouses the blood lust of the participants and the spectators, personal combat winds up

the exercises upon graduation day. Those of the graduating class who survive are inducted into the warrior caste—the highest caste among the Morgors. Art, literature, and science, except as they may pertain to war, are held in contempt by the Morgors. They have been kept alive upon Eurobus only through the efforts of us Savators; but, unfortunately, to the neglect of offensive military preparation and training. Being a peace loving people, we armed only for defense." He smiled ruefully and shrugged. "But wars are not won by defensive methods."

"Tell us more about the graduating exercises," said U Dan. "The idea is intriguing. With whom does the graduating class contend?"

"With criminals and slaves," replied the Savator. "Mostly men of my race," he added; "although sometimes there are Morgor criminals of the worst types sentenced to die thus. It is supposed to be the most shameful death that a Morgor can die—fighting shoulder to shoulder with members of a lower order against their own kind."

"Members of a lower order!" I said. "Do the Morgors consider you that?"

"Just a step above the dumb beasts, but accountable for our acts because we are supposed to be able to differentiate between right and wrong—wrong being any word or act or facial expression adversely critical of anything Morgorian or that can be twisted into a subversive act or gesture."

"And suppose you survive the graduating contest?" I asked. "Are you then set at liberty?"

"In theory, yes," he replied; "but in practice, never."

"You mean they fail to honor terms of their own making?" asked U Dan.

THE Savator laughed. "They are entirely without honor," he said,

"yet I do not know that they would not liberate one who survived the combats; because, insofar as I know, no one ever has. You see, the members of the graduating class outnumber their antagonists two to one."

This statement gave me a still lower estimate of the character of the Morgors than I had already inferred from my own observation of them. It is not usual that a warlike people excel in chivalry and a sense of honor; but where all other characteristics are made subservient to brutality, finer humanistic instincts atrophy and disappear.

We sat in silence for some time. It was broken by the Savator. "I do not know your names," he said. "Mine is Zan Dar."

As I told him ours, a detail of Morgor warriors came to our cell and ordered U Dan and me to accompany them. "Good-by!" said Zan Dar. "We probably shall never meet again."

"Shut up, thing!" admonished one of the warriors.

Zan Dar winked at me and laughed. The Morgor was furious. "Silence, creature!" he growled. I thought for a moment that he was going to fall upon Zan Dar with his sword, but he who was in charge of the detail ordered him out of the cell. The incident was but another proof of the egomaniac arrogance of the Morgors. However, it helped to crystalize within me an admiration and liking for the Savator that had been growing since first he spoke to us.

U Dan and I were led across the plaza to a very large building the entrance to which was heavily guarded. The hideous, grinning, skull-like heads of the warriors and their skeletal limbs and bodies, together with the dark and cavernous entrance to the building suggested a grisly fantasia of hell's entrance guarded by the rotting dead. It

was not a pleasant thought.

We were held here for quite some time, during which some of the warriors discussed us as one might discuss a couple of stray alley cats. "They are like the Savators and yet unlike them," said one.

"They are quite as hideous," said another.

"One of them is much darker than the other."

Now, for the first time, I was struck by the color of these Morgors. Instead of being ivory color, they were a pink or rosy shade. I looked at U Dan. He was a very dark red. A glance at my arms and hands showed that they, too, were dark red; but not as dark a red as U Dan. At first I was puzzled; then I realized that the reflection of the red glare of the volcanoes from the inner surface of the cloud envelope turned our reddish skins a darker red and made the yellow, parchmentlike skins of the Morgors appear pink. As I looked around, I realized that this same reddish hue appeared upon everything within sight. It reminded me of a verse in a popular song I heard some time ago on one of my visits to earth. It went, I think: "I am looking at the world through rose colored glasses, and everything is rosy now." Well, everything wasn't rosy with me, no matter how rosy this world looked.

Presently an officer came to the entrance and ordered our escort to bring us in. The interior of the building was as unlovely as its exterior. Although this was, as I later learned, the principal palace of the Morgor ruler, there was absolutely no sign of ornamentation. No art relieved the austerity of gloomy, lava-brown corridors and bare, rectangular chambers. No hangings softened the sharp edges of openings; no rugs hid even a part of the bare, brown floors. The pictureless walls

frowned down upon us. I have seldom been in a more depressing environment. Even the pits beneath the deserted cities of Barsoom often had interesting vaulted ceilings, arched doorways, elaborate old iron grill work, attesting the artistic temperaments of their designers. The Morgors, like death, were without art.

WE WERE led to a large, bare chamber in which a number of Morgors were clustered about a desk at which another of the creatures was seated. All Morgors look very much alike to me, yet they do have individual facial and physical characteristics; so I was able to recognize Haglion among those standing about the desk. It was Haglion who had commanded the ship that had brought me from Mars.

U Dan and I were halted at some distance from the group, and as we stood here two other red Martians were brought into the room—a man and a girl. The girl was very beautiful.

"Vaja!" exclaimed U Dan, but I did not need this evidence to know who she was. It was equally certain that the man was Multis Par, Prince of Zor. He appeared nervous and downcast, but even so the natural arrogance of the man was indelibly stamped upon his features.

At U Dan's exclamation, one of those guarding us whispered, "Silence, thing!" Vaja's eyes went wide in incredulity as she recognized my companion; and she took an impulsive step toward him, but a warrior seized her arm and restrained her. The faint shadow of a malicious smile touched the thin lips of Multis Par.

The man seated at the desk issued an order, and all four of us were brought forward and lined up in front of him. The fellow differed in appearance not at all from other Morgors. He wore

no ornaments. His harness and weapons were quite plain but evidently servicable. They were marked, with a hieroglyph that differed from similar markings on the harness and weapons of the other Morgors, as those of each of the others differed from all the rest. I did not know then what they signified; but later learned that each hieroglyph indicated the name, rank, and title of him who wore it. The hieroglyph of the man at the desk was that of Bandolian, Emperor of the Morgors.

Spread upon the desk before Bandolian was a large map, which I instantly recognized as that of Barsoom. The man and his staff had evidently been studying it. As U Dan and I were halted before his desk with Vaja and Multis Par, Bandolian looked up at the Prince of Zor.

"Which is he," he asked, "who is called Warlord of Barsoom?" Multis Par indicated me, and Bandolian turned his hollow eyes upon me. It was as though Death had looked upon me and singled me out as his own. "I understand that your name is John Carter," he said. I nodded in affirmation. "While you are of a lower order," he continued, "yet it must be that you are endowed with intelligence of a sort. It is to this intelligence that I address my commands. I intend to invade and conquer Barsoom (he called it Garobus), and I command you to give me all the assistance in your power by acquainting me and my staff with such military information as you may possess relative to the principal powers of Garobus, especially that one known as the Empire of Helium. In return for this your life will be spared."

I looked at him for a moment, and then I laughed in his face. The faintest suggestion of a flush overspread the pallor of his face. "You dare laugh at me, thing!" he growled.

"It is my answer to your proposition," I said.

Bandolian was furious. "Take it away and destroy it!" he ordered.

"Wait, Great Bandolian!" urged Multis Par. "His knowledge is almost indispensable to you, and I have a plan whereby you may make use of it."

"What is it?" demanded Bandolian.

"He has a mate whom he worships. Seize her and he will pay any price to protect her from harm."

"Not the price the Morgor has asked," I said to Multis Par, "and if she is brought here it will be the seal upon your death warrant."

"Enough of this," snapped Bandolian. "Take them all away."

"Shall I destroy the one called John Carter?" asked the officer who commanded the detail that had brought us to the audience chamber.

"Not immediately."

"He struck a Morgor," said Haglion; "one of my officers."

"He shall die for that, too," said Bandolian.

"That will be twice," I said.

"Take it away!" snapped Bandolian.

As we were led away, Vaja and U Dan gazed longingly at one another.

CHAPTER V

ZAN DAR, the Savator, was surprised to see us return to the cell in so short a time. "In fact," he said, "I did not expect ever to see you again. How did it happen?"

I explained briefly what had occurred in the audience chamber, adding, "I have been returned to the cell to await death."

"And you, U Dan?" he asked.

"I don't know why they bothered to take me up there," replied U Dan. "Bandolian paid no attention to me whatever."

"He had a reason, you may rest assured. He is probably trying to break down your morale by letting you see the girl you love, in the belief that you will influence John Carter to accede to his demands. John Carter lives only because Bandolian hopes to eventually break down his resistance."

Time dragged heavily in that cell beneath the Morgor city. There was no means for determining the passage of time. For that matter, there would have been none had we been above ground, for there are no nights upon Jupiter. It is always day. The sun, four hundred eighty-three million miles away, would shed but little light upon the planet even were it exposed to the full light of the star that is the center of our solar system; but that little light is obscured by the dense cloud envelope which surrounds this distant world. What little filters through is negated by the gigantic volcanic torches which bathe the entire planet in perpetual daylight. Although Jupiter rotates upon its axis in less than ten hours, its day is for eternity.

U Dan and I learned much concerning conditions on the planet from Zan Dar. He told us of the vast warm seas which seethed in constant tidal agitation resulting from the constantly changing positions of the four larger moons which revolve about Jupiter in forty-two hours, eighty-five hours, one hundred seventy-two hours, and four hundred hours respectively while the planet spins upon its axis, making a complete revolution in nine hours and fifty-five minutes. He told us of vast continents and enormous islands; and I could well imagine that such existed, as a rough estimate indicated that the area of the planet exceeded twenty-three billion square miles.

As the axis of Jupiter is nearly perpendicular to the plane of its motion,

having an inclination of only about 3°, there could be no great variety of seasons; so over this enormous area there existed an equable climate, warm and humid, perpetually lighted and heated by the innumerable volcanoes which pit the surface of the planet. And here was I, an adventurer who had explored two worlds, cooped up in a subterranean cell upon the most amazing and wonderful planet of our entire solar system! It was maddening.

ZAN DAR told us that the continent upon which we were was the largest. It was the ancestral home of the Morgor Governor-General, paid tribute to the Morgors in manufactured goods, foodstuffs, and slaves. There were still a few areas, small and considered of little value by the Morgors, which retained their liberty and their own governments. From such an area came Zan Dar—a remote island called Zantor.

"It is a land of tremendous mountains, thickly forested with trees of great size and height," he said. "Because of our mountains and our forests, it is an easy land to defend against an air borne enemy."

When he told me the height of some of the lofty peaks of Zantor, it was with difficulty that I could believe him: to a height of twenty miles above sea level rose the majestic king of Zantor's mountains.

"The Morgors have sent many an expedition against us," said Zan Dar. "They get a foothold in some little valley; and there, above them and surrounding them in mountain fastnesses that are familiar to us and unknown to them, we have had them at our mercy, picking them off literally one by one until they are so reduced in numbers that they dare remain no longer. They kill many of us, too;

and they take prisoners. I was taken thus in one of their invasions. If they brought enough ships and enough men, I suppose they could conquer us; but our land is scarcely worth the effort, and I think they prefer to leave us as we are to give their recruits practice in actual warfare."

I don't know how long we had been confined when Multis Par was brought to our cell by an officer and a detachment of warriors. He came to exhort me to co-operate with Bandolian.

"The invasion and conquest of Barsoom are inevitable," he said. "By assisting Bandolian you can mitigate the horror of it for the inhabitants of Barsoom. You will thus be serving our world far better than by stupidity and stubbornly refusing to meet Bandolian half way."

"You are wasting your time," I said.

"But our own lives depend upon it," he cried. "You and U Dan, Vaja and I shall die if you refuse. Bandolian's patience is almost worn out now." He looked pleadingly at U Dan.

"We could not die in a better cause," said U Dan, much to my surprise. "I shall be glad to die in atonement for the wrong that I did John Carter."

"You are two fools!" exclaimed Multis Par, angrily.

"At least we are not traitors," I reminded him.

"You will die, John Carter," he growled, "but before you die, you shall see your mate in the clutches of Bandolian. She has been sent for. Now, if you change your mind, send word by one of those who bring your meals."

I sprang forward and knocked the creature down. I should have killed him then had not the Morgors dragged him from the cell.

SO THEY had sent for Dejah Thoris—and I was helpless. They would

get her. I knew how they would get her—by assuring her that only through her co-operation could my immediate death be averted. I wondered if they would win. Would I, in the final test, sacrifice my beloved princess or my adopted country? Frankly, I did not know; but I had the example of U Dan to guide me. He had placed patriotism above love. Would I?

Time dragged on in this gloomy cell where there was no time. We three plotted innumerable futile plans of escape. We improvised games to help mitigate the monotony of our dull existence. More profitably, however, U Dan and I learned much from Zan Dar concerning this great planet. And Zan Dar learned much of what lay beyond the eternal cloud envelope which hides from the view of the inhabitants of Jupiter the sun, the other planets, the stars, and even their own moons. All that Zan Dar knew of them was the little he had been able to glean from remarks dropped by Morgors of what had been seen from their interplanetary ships. Their knowledge of astronomy was only slightly less than their interest in the subject, which was practically non-existent. War, conquest, and bloodshed were their sole interests in life.

At last there came a break in the deadly monotony of our lives: a new prisoner was thrown into the cell with us. And he was a Morgor! The situation was embarrassing. Had our numbers been reversed, had there been three Morgors and one of us, there would have been no doubt as to the treatment that one would have received. He would have been ostracized, imposed upon, and very possibly abused. The Morgor expected this fate. He went into a far corner of the cell and awaited what he had every reason to expect. U Dan, Zan

Dar, and I discussed the situation in whispers. That must have been a trying time for the Morgor. We three finally decided to treat the creature simply as a fellow prisoner until such time as his own conduct should be our eventual guide. Zan Dar was the first to break the ice. In a friendly manner he asked what mischance had brought the fellow to this pass.

"I killed one who had an influential relative in the palace of Bandolian," he replied, and as he spoke he came over closer to us. "For that I shall die, probably in the graduating exercises of the next class. We shall doubtless all die together," he added with a hollow laugh. He paused. "Unless we escape," he concluded.

"Then we shall die," said Zan Dar.

"Perhaps," said the Morgor.

"One does not escape from the prisons of the Morgors," said Zan Dar.

I was interested in that one word "perhaps." It seemed to me fraught with intentional meaning. I determined to cultivate this animated skeleton. It could do no harm and might lead to good. I told him my name and the names of my companions; then I asked his.

"Vorion," he replied, "but I need no introduction to you, John Carter. We have met before. Don't you recognize me?" I had to admit that I did not. Vorion laughed. "I slapped your face and you knocked me across the ship. It was a noble blow. For a long time they thought I was dead."

"Oh," I said, "you were one of my instructors. It may please you to know that I am going to die for that blow."

"Perhaps not," said Vorion. There was that "perhaps" again. What did the fellow mean?

MUCH to our surprise, Vorion proved not at all a bad com-

panion. Toward Bandolian and the powerful forces that had condemned him to death and thrown him into prison he was extremely bitter. I learned from him that the apparent veneration and loyalty accorded Bandolian by his people was wholly a matter of disciplined regimentation. At heart, Vorion loathed the man as a monster of cruelty and tyranny. "Fear and generations of training hold our apparent loyalty," he said.

After he had been with us for some time, he said to me, "You three have been very decent to me. You could have made my life miserable here; and I could not have blamed you had you done so, for you must hate us Morgors."

"We are all in the same boat," I said. "We could gain nothing by fighting among ourselves. If we work together—perhaps—" I used his own perhaps.

Vorion nodded. "I have been thinking that we might work together," he said.

"To what end?" I asked.

"Escape."

"Is that possible?"

"Perhaps."

U Dan and Zan Dar were eager listeners. Vorion turned to the latter. "If we should escape," he said, "you three have a country to which you might go with every assurance of finding asylum, while I could expect only death in any country upon the face of the Eurobus. If you could promise me safety in your country—" He paused, evidently awaiting Zar Dar's reaction.

"I could only promise to do my best for you," said Zan Dar; "but I am confident that if you were the means of my liberation and return to Zanor, you would be permitted to remain there in safety."

Our plotting was interrupted by the arrival of a detail of warriors. The officer in command singled me out and ordered me from the cell. If I were to be separated from my companions, I saw the fabric of my dream of escape dissolve before my eyes.

They led me from the building and across the plaza to the palace of Bandolian, and after some delay I found myself again in the audience chamber. From behind his desk, the hollow eyes of the tyrant stared at me from their grinning skull. "I am giving you your last chance," said Bandolian, then he turned to one of his officers. "Bring in the other," he said. There was a short wait, and then a door at my right opened and a guard of warriors brought in the "other." It was Dejah Thoris! My incomparable Dejah Thoris!

WHAT a lovely creature she was as she crossed the floor surrounded by hideous Morgors. What majestic dignity, what fearlessness distinguished her carriage and her mien! That such as she should be sacrificed even for a world! They halted her scarce two paces from me. She gave me a brave smile, and whispered, "Courage! I know now why I am here. Do not weaken. Better death than dishonor."

"What is she saying?" demanded Bandolian.

I thought quickly. I knew that the chances were that not one of them there understood the language of Barsoom. In their stupid arrogance they would not deign to master the tongue of a lower order.

"She but pleads with me to save her," I said. I saw Dejah Thoris smile. Evidently they had taught her the language of the Morgors on the long voyage from Mars.

"And you will be wise to do so," said

Bandolian, "otherwise she will be given to Multis Par and afterward tortured and mutilated many times before she is permitted to die."

I shuddered in contemplation of such a fate for my princess, and in that moment I weakened once again. "If I aid you, will she be returned unharmed to Helium?" I asked.

"Both of you will—after I have conquered Garobus," replied Bandolian.

"No! No!" whispered Dejah Thoris. "I should rather die than return to Helium with a traitor. No, John Carter, you could never be that even to save my life."

"But the torture! The mutilation! I would be a traitor a thousand times over to save you from that, and I can promise you that no odium would be attached to you: I should never return to Barsoom."

"I shall be neither tortured nor mutilated," she said. "Sewn into my harness is a long, thin blade."

I understood and I was relieved. "Very well," I said. "If we are to die for Barsoom, it is no more than thousands of her brave warriors have done in the past; but we are not dead yet. Remember that, my princess; and do not use that long, thin blade upon yourself until hope is absolutely dead."

"While you live, hope will live," she said.

"Come! Come!" said Bandolian. "I have listened long enough to your silly jabbering. Do you accept my proposition?"

"I am considering it," I said, "but I must have a few more words with my mate."

"Let them be few," snapped the Morgor.

I turned to Dejah Thoris. "Where are you imprisoned?" I asked.

"On the top floor of a tower at the rear of this building at the corner near-

est the great volcano. There is another Barsoomian with me—a girl from Zor. Her name is Vaja."

Bandolian was becoming impatient. He drummed nervously on his desk with his knuckles and snapped his grinning jaws together like castanets. "Enough of this!" he growled. "What is your decision?"

"The matter is one of vast importance to me," I replied. "I cannot decide it in a moment. Return me to my cell so that I may think it over and discuss it with U Dan, who also has much at stake."

"Take it back to its cell," ordered Bandolian; and then, to me: "You shall have time, but not much. My patience is exhausted."

CHAPTER VI

I HAD no plan. I was practically without hope, yet I had gained at least a brief reprieve for Dejah Thoris. Perhaps a means of escape might offer itself. Upon such unsubstantial fare I fed the shred of hope to which I clung.

My cellmates were both surprised and relieved when I was returned to them. I told them briefly of what had occurred in the audience chamber of Bandolian. U Dan showed real grief when he learned that Dejah Thoris was in the clutches of the Morgors, and cursed himself for the part he had taken in bringing her and me to a situation in which we faced the alternatives of death or dishonor.

"Vain regrets never got anyone anywhere," I said. "They won't get us out of this cell. They won't get Dejah Thoris and Vaja out of Bandolian's tower. Forget them. We have other things to think about." I turned to Vorian. "You have spoken of the possibility of escape. Explain yourself."

He was not accustomed to being

spoken to thus peremptorily by one of the lower orders, as the Morgors considered us; but he laughed, taking it in good part. The Morgors cannot smile. From birth to death they wear their death's head grin—frozen, unchangeable.

"There is just a chance," he said. "It is just barely a chance. Slender would be an optimistic description of it, but if it fails we shall be no worse off than we are now."

"Tell us what it is," I said.

"I can pick the lock of our cell door," he explained. "If luck is with us, we can escape from this building. I know a way that is little used, for I was for long one of the prison guard."

"What chance would we have once we were in the streets of the city?" demanded U Dan. "We three, at least, would be picked up immediately."

"Not necessarily," said Vorion. "There are many slaves on the avenues who look exactly like Zan Dar. Of course, the color of the skin of you men from Garobus might attract attention; but that is a chance we shall have to take."

"And after we are in the streets?" asked Zan Dar. "What then?"

"I shall pretend that I am in charge of you. I shall treat you as slaves are so often treated that it will arouse no comment nor attract any undue attention. I shall have to be rough with you, but you will understand. I shall herd you to a field where there are many ships. There I shall tell the guard that I have orders to bring you to clean a certain ship. In this field are only the private ships of the rich and powerful among us, and I well know a certain ship that belongs to one who seldom uses it. If we can reach this ship and board it, nothing can prevent us from escaping. In an hour from now, we shall be on our way to

Zanor—if all goes well."

"And if we can take Vaja and Dejah Thoris with us," I added.

"I had forgotten them," said Vorion. "You would risk your lives for two females?"

"Certainly," said U Dan.

VORION shrugged. "You are strange creatures," he said. "We Morgors would not risk a little finger for a score of them. The only reason that we tolerate them at all is that they are needed to replenish the supply of warriors. To attempt to rescue two of yours may easily end in disaster for us all."

"However, we shall make the attempt," I said. "Are you with us, Zan Dar?" I asked the Savator.

"To the end," he said, "whatever it may be."

Again Vorion shrugged. "As you will," he said, but not with much enthusiasm; then he set to work on the lock, and in a very short time the door swung open and we stepped out into the corridor. Vorion closed the door and relocked it. "This is going to give them food for speculation," he remarked.

He led us along the corridor in the opposite direction from that in which we had been brought to it and from which all those had come who had approached our cell since our incarceration. The corridor became dark and dusty the farther we traversed it. Evidently it was little used. At its very end was a door, the lock to which Vorion quickly picked; and a moment later we stepped out into a narrow alleyway.

So simple had been our escape up to now that I immediately apprehended the worst: such luck could not last. Even the alley which we had entered was deserted: no one had seen us emerge from the prison. But when we

reached the end of the alley and turned into a broad avenue, the situation was very different. Here were many people—Morgors upon the sidewalks, slaves in the gutters, strange beasts of burden carrying their loads of passengers upon the pavement.

Now, Vorion began to berate and cuff us as we walked in the gutter and he upon the sidewalk. He directed us away from the central plaza and finally into less frequented avenues, yet we still passed too many Morgors to suit me. At any minute one of them might notice the unusual coloration of U Dan's skin and mine. I glanced at Zan Dar to note if the difference between his coloration and ours was at all startling, and I got a shock. Zan Dar's skin had been blue. Now it was purple! It took me a moment to realize that the change was due to the rosy light of the volcano's flames turning Zan Dar's natural blue to purple.

We had covered quite a little distance in safety, when a Morgor, passing, eyed us suspiciously. He let us go by him; then he wheeled and called to Vorion. "Who are those two?" he demanded. "They are not Savators."

"They have been ill," said Vorion, "and their color has changed." I was surprised that the fellow could think so quickly.

"Well, who are you?" asked the fellow, "and what are you doing in charge of slaves while unarmed?"

Vorion looked down at his sides in simulated surprise. "Why, I must have forgotten them," he said.

"I think that you are lying to me," said the fellow. "Come along with me, all of you."

HERE seemed an end of our hopes of escape. I glanced up and down the street. It appeared to be a quiet, residential avenue. There was no one

near us. Several small ships rested at the curb in front of drear, brown domiciles. That was all. No eyes were upon us. I stepped close to the fellow who had thus rashly presented himself as an obstacle in the way of Dejah Thoris' rescue. I struck him once. I struck him with all my strength. He dropped like a log.

"You have killed him," exclaimed Vorion. "He was one of Bandolian's most trusted officers. If we are caught now, we shall be tortured to death."

"We need not be caught," I said. "Let's take one of these ships standing at the curb. Why take the time and the risk to go farther?"

Vorion shook his head. "They wouldn't do," he said. "They are only for intramural use. They are low altitude ships that would never get over even a relatively small mountain range; but more important still, they cannot be rendered invisible. We shall have to go on to the field as we have planned."

"To avoid another such encounter as we have just experienced," I said, "we had better take one of these ships at least to the vicinity of the field."

"We shall be no worse off adding theft to murder," said Zan Dar.

Vorion agreed, and a moment later we were all in a small ship and sailing along a few yards above the avenue. Keenly interested, I carefully noted everything that Vorion did in starting the motor and controlling the craft. It was necessary for me to ask only a few questions in order to have an excellent grasp of the handling of the little ship, so familiar was I with the air ships of two other worlds. Perhaps I should never have the opportunity to operate one of these, but it could do no harm to know how.

We quitted the flier a short distance from the field and continued on foot. As Vorion had predicted, a guard halted

us and questioned him. For a moment everything hung in the balance. The guard appeared skeptical, and the reason for his skepticism was largely that which had motivated the officer I had killed to question the regularity of Vorion's asserted mission—the fact that Vorion was unarmed. The guard told us to wait while he summoned an officer. That would have been fatal. I felt that I might have to kill this man, too; but I did not see how I could do it without being observed, as there were many Morgors upon the field, though none in our immediate vicinity.

Vorion saved the day. "Come! Come!" he exclaimed in a tone of exasperation. "I can't wait here all day while you send for an officer. I am in a hurry. Let me take these slaves on and start them to work. The officer can come to the ship and question me as well as he can question me here."

THE guard agreed that there was something in this; and, after ascertaining the name and location of the ship which we were supposed to clean, he permitted us to proceed. I breathed an inward sigh of relief. After we had left him, Vorion said that he had given him the name and location of a different ship than that which we were planning to steal. Vorion was no fool.

The ship that Vorion had selected was a slim craft which appeared to have been designed for speed. We lost no time boarding her; and once again I watched every move that Vorion made, questioning him concerning everything that was not entirely clear to me. Although I had spent some eighteen days aboard one of these Morgorian ships, I had learned nothing relative to their control, as I had never been allowed in the control room nor permitted to ask questions.

First, Vorion magnetized the hull and

sprayed it with the fine sands of invisibility; then he started the motor and nosed up gently. I had explained my plan to him, and once he had gained a little altitude he headed for the palace of Bandolian. Through a tiny lens set in the bow of the ship the view ahead was reflected upon a ground glass plate, just as an image is projected upon the finder of a camera. There were several of these lenses, and through one of them I presently saw the square tower at the rear of the palace, the tower in which Dejah Thoris and Vaja were confined.

"When I bring the ship up to the window," said Vorion, "you will have to work fast, as the moment that we open the door in the ship's hull, part of the interior of the ship will be visible. Some one in the palace or upon the ground may notice it, and instantly we shall be surrounded by guard and patrol ships."

"I shall work fast," I said.

I must admit that I was more excited than usual as Vorion brought the craft alongside the tower window, which we had seen was wide open and unbarred. U Dan and Zan Dar stood by to open the door so that I could leap through the window and then to close it immediately after I had come aboard with the two girls. I could no longer see the window now that the craft was broadside to it; but at a word from Vorion, U Dan and Zan Dar slid the door back. The open window was before me, and I leaped through it into the interior of the tower room.

Fortunately for me, fortunately for Dejah Thoris, and fortunately for Vaja, it was the right room. The two girls were there, but they were not alone. A man held Dejah Thoris in his arms, his lips searching for hers. Vaja was striking him futilely on the back, and Dejah Thoris was trying to push his face from hers.

I seized the man by the neck and hurled him across the room; then I pointed to the window and the ship beyond and told the girls to get aboard as fast as they could. They needed no second invitation. As they ran across the room toward the window, the man rose and faced me. It was Multis Par! Recognizing me, he went almost white; then he whipped out his sword and simultaneously commenced to shout for the guard.

Seeing that I was unarmed, he came for me. I could not turn and run for the window: had I, he could have run me through long before I could have reached it; so I did the next best thing. I charged straight for him. This apparently suicidal act of mine evidently confused him, for he fell back. But when I was close to him, he lunged for me. I parried the thrust with my forearm. I was inside his point now, and an instant later my fingers closed upon his throat. Like a fool, he dropped his sword then and attempted to claw my fingers loose with his two hands. He could have shortened his hold on it and run me through the heart, but I had to take that chance.

I WOULD have finished him off in a moment had not the door of the room been thrown open to admit a dozen Morgor warriors. I was stunned! After everything had worked so well, to have this happen! Were all our plans to be thus thwarted? No, not all.

I shouted to U Dan: "Close the door and take off! It is a command!"

U Dan hesitated. Dejah Thoris stood at his side with one hand outstretched toward me and an indescribable expression of anguish on her face. She took a step forward as though to leap from the ship back into the room. U Dan quickly barred her way, and

then the ship started to move away. Slowly the door slid closed, and once again the craft was entirely invisible.

All this transpired in but a few seconds while I still clung to Multis Par's throat. His tongue protruded and his eyes stared glassily. In a moment more he would have been dead; then the Morgor warriors were upon me, and I was dragged from my prey.

My captors handled me rather roughly and, perhaps, not without reason, for I had knocked three of them unconscious before they overpowered me. Had I but had a sword! What I should have done to them then! But though I was battered and bruised as they hustled me down from the tower, I was smiling; for I was happy. Dejah Thoris had been snatched from the clutches of the skeleton men and was, temporarily at least, safe. I had good cause for rejoicing.

I was taken to a small, unlighted cell beneath the tower; and here I was manacled and chained to the wall. A heavy door was slammed shut as my captors left me, and I heard a key turn in a massive lock.

Alone, in utter darkness, I awaited my fate.

CHAPTER VII

IN SOLITARY confinement unrelieved by even a suggestion of light, one is thrown entirely upon the resources of one's thoughts for mitigation of absolute boredom—such boredom as sometimes leads to insanity for those of weak wills and feeble nerves. But my thoughts were pleasant thoughts. I envisaged Dejah Thoris safely bound for a friendly country in an invisible ship which would be safe from capture, and I felt that three of those who accompanied her would be definitely friendly and that one of them, U Dan, might be

expected to lay down his life to protect her were that ever necessary. As to Vorion, I could not even guess what his attitude toward her would be.

My own situation gave me little concern. I will admit that it looked rather hopeless, but I had been in tight places before and yet managed to survive and escape. I still lived, and while life is in me I never give up hope. I am a confirmed optimist, which, I think, gives me an attitude of mind that more often than not commands what we commonly term the breaks of life.

Fortunately, I was not long confined in that dark cell. I slept once, for how long I do not know; and I was very hungry when a detail of warriors came to take me away; hungry and thirsty, for they had given me neither food nor water while I had been confined.

I was not taken before Bandolian this time, but to one of his officers—a huge skeleton that continually opened and closed its jaws with a snapping and grinding sound. The creature was Death incarnate. From the way he questioned me, I concluded that he must be the lord high inquisitor. In silence, he eyed me from those seemingly hollow sockets for a full minute before he spoke; then he bellowed at me.

"Thing," he shouted, "for even a small part of what you have done you deserve death—death after torture."

"You don't have to shout at me," I said; "I'm not deaf."

That enraged him, and he pounded upon his desk. "For impudence and disrespect it will go harder with you."

"I cannot show respect when I do not feel respect," I told him. "I respect only those who command my respect. I surely could not respect a bag of bones with an evil disposition."

I do not know why I deliberately tried to infuriate him. Perhaps it is

just a weakness of mine to enjoy baiting enemies whom I think contemptible. It is, I admit, a habit fraught with danger; and, perhaps, a stupid habit; but I have found that it sometimes so disconcerts an enemy as to give me a certain advantage. In this instance I was at least successful in part: the creature was so furious that for some time it remained speechless; then it leaped to its feet with drawn sword.

MY SITUATION was far from enviable. I was unarmed, and the creature facing me was in an uncontrollable rage. In addition to all this, there were four or five other Morgors in the room, two of whom were holding my arms—one on either side. I was as helpless as a sheep in an abattoir. But as my would-be executioner came around the end of his desk to spit me on his blade, another Morgor entered the room.

The newcomer took in the situation at a glance, and shouted, "Stop, Gorgum!" The thing coming for me hesitated; then he dropped his point.

"The creature deserves death," Gorgum said, sullenly. "It defied and insulted me—me, an officer of the Great Bandolian!"

"Vengeance belongs to Bandolian," said the other, "and he has different plans for this insolent worm. What has your questioning developed?"

"He has been so busy screaming at me that he has had no time to question me," I said.

"Silence, low one!" snapped the newcomer. "I can well understand," he said to Gorgum, "that your patience must have been sorely tried; but we must respect the wishes of the Great Bandolian. Proceed with the investigation."

Gorgum returned his sword to its scabbard and reseated himself at his

desk. "What is your name?" he demanded.

"John Carter, Prince of Helium," I replied. A scribe at Gorgum's side scribbled in a large book. I supposed that he was recording the question and the answer. He kept this up during the entire interview.

"How did you and the other conspirators escape from the cell in which you were confined?" Gorgum asked.

"Through the doorway," I replied.

"That is impossible. The door was locked when you were placed in the cell. It was locked at the time your absence was discovered."

"If you know so much, why bother to question me?"

Gorgum's jaws snapped and ground more viciously than ever. "You see, Horur," he said angrily, turning to the other officer, "the insolence of the creature."

"Answer the noble Gorgum's question," Horur snapped at me. "How did you pass through a locked door?"

"It was not locked."

"It *was* locked," shouted Gorgum.

I shrugged. "What is the use?" I asked. "It is a waste of time to answer the questions of one who knows more about the subject than I, notwithstanding the fact that he was not there."

"Tell me, then, in your own words how you escaped from the cell," said Horur in a less irritating tone of voice.

"We picked the lock."

"That would have been impossible," bellowed Gorgum.

"Then we are still in the cell," I said.

"Perhaps you had better go and look."

"We are getting nowhere," snapped Horur.

"Rapidly," I agreed.

"I shall question the prisoner," said Horur. "We concede that you did escape from the cell."

"Rather shrewd of you."

HE IGNORED the comment. "I cannot see that that means you adopted are of great importance. What we really wish to know is where your accomplices and the two female prisoners are now. Multis Par says that they escaped in a ship—probably one of our own which was stolen from a flying field."

"I do not know where they are."

"Do you know where they planned to go?"

"If I did, I would not tell you."

"I command you to answer me, on pain of death."

I laughed at the creature. "You intend to kill me anyway; so your threat finds me indifferent."

Horur kept his temper much better than had Gorgum, but I could see that he was annoyed. "You could preserve your life if you were more co-operative," he said. "Great Bandolian asks but little of you. Tell us where your accomplices intended going and promise to aid Great Bandolian in his conquest of Helium, and your life will be spared."

"No," I said.

"Wait," urged Horur. "Bandolian will go even further. Following our conquest of Helium, he will permit you and your mate to return to that country and he will give you a high office in the new government he intends to establish there. If you refuse, you shall be destroyed; your mate will be hunted down and, I promise you, she will be found. Her fate will be infinitely worse than death. You had better think it over."

"I do not need to think over such a proposition. I can give you a final answer on both counts—my irrevocable answer. It is—never!"

If Horur had had a lip, he would doubtless have bitten it. He looked at me for a long minute; then he said,

"Fool!" after which he turned to Gorgum. "Have it placed with those who are being held for the next class;" then he left the room.

I was now taken to a building located at some distance from those in which I had previously been incarcerated, and placed in a large cell with some twenty other prisoners, all of whom were Savators.

"What have we here?" demanded one of my fellow prisoners after my escort had left and locked the door. "A man with a red skin! He is no Savator. What are you, fellow?"

I DID not like the looks of him, nor his tone of voice. I was not seeking trouble with those with whom I was to be imprisoned and with whom I was probably destined to die; so I walked away from the fellow and sat down on a bench in another part of the chamber, which was quite large. But the fool followed me and stood in front of me in a truculent attitude.

"I asked you what you were," he said, threateningly; "and when Pho Lar asks you a question, see that you answer it—and quickly. I am top man here." He looked around at the others. "That's right, isn't it?" he demanded of them.

There were some sullen, affirmative grunts. I could see at once that the fellow was unpopular. He appeared a man of considerable muscular development; and his reception of me, a newcomer among them, testified to the fact that he was a bully. It was evident that he had the other prisoners cowed.

"You seem to be looking for trouble, Lo Phar," I said; "but I am not. I am already in enough trouble."

"My name is Pho Lar, fellow," he barked.

"What difference does it make? You would stink by any name." The other

prisoners immediately took interested notice. Some of them grinned.

"I see that I shall have to put you in your place," said Pho Lar, advancing toward me angrily.

"I do not want any trouble with you," I said. "It is bad enough to be imprisoned, without quarrelling with fellow prisoners."

"You are evidently a coward," said Pho Lar; "so, if you will get down on your knees and ask my pardon, I shall not harm you."

I had to laugh at that, which made the fellow furious; yet he hesitated to attack me. I realized then that he was a typical bully—yellow at heart. However, to save his face, he would probably attack me if he could not bluff me. "Don't make me angry," he said. "When I am angry I do not know my own strength. I might kill you."

"I wonder if this would make you angry," I said, and slapped him across the cheek with my open palm. I slapped him so hard that he nearly fell down. I could have slapped him harder. This staggered him more than physically. The blood rushed to his blue face until it turned purple. He was in a spot. He had started something; and if he were to hold his self-appointed position as top man, as he had described himself, he would have to finish it. The other prisoners had now all arisen and formed a half circle about us. They looked alternately at Pho Lar and at me in eager anticipation.

PHO LAR had to do something about that slap in the face. He rushed at me and struck out clumsily. As I warded off his blows, I realized that he was a very powerful man; but he lacked science, and I was sure that he lacked guts. I determined to teach him a lesson that he would not soon forget.

I could have landed a blow in the first few seconds of our encounter that would have put him to sleep, but I preferred to play with him.

I countered merely with another slap in the face. He came back with a haymaker that I ducked; then I slapped him again—a little harder this time.

"Good work!" exclaimed one of the prisoners.

"Go to it, red man!" cried another.

"Kill him!" shouted a third.

Pho Lar tried to clinch, but I caught one of his wrists, wheeled around, bent over, and threw him over my shoulder. He lit heavily on the lava flooring. He lay there for a moment, and as he scrambled to his feet I put a headlock on him and threw him again. This time he did not get up; so I picked him up and hit him on the chin. He went down for a long count. I was through with him, and went and sat down.

The prisoners gathered around me. I could see that they were pleased with the outcome of the fight. "Pho Lar's had this coming to him for a long time," said one.

"He sure got it at last!"

"Who are you, anyway?"

"My name is John Carter. I am from Garobus."

"I have heard of you," said one.

"I think we all have. The Morgors are furious at you because you tricked them so easily. I suppose they have sent you here to die with us. My name is Han Du." He held out a hand to me. It was the first time that I had seen this friendly gesture since leaving the earth. The Martians place a hand upon your shoulder. I took his hand.

"I am glad to know you, Han Du," I said. "If there are many more here like Pho Lar, I shall probably need a friend."

"There are no more like him," said

Han Du, "and he is finished."

"You intimated that we are all doomed to die," I said. "Do you know when or how?"

"When the next class graduates, we shall be pitted against twice our number of Morgors. It will be soon, now."

CHAPTER VIII

PHO LAR was unconscious for a long time. For a while, I thought that I might have killed him, but finally he opened his eyes and looked about. Then he sat up, felt of his head, and rubbed his jaw. When his eyes found me, he dropped them to the floor. Slowly and painfully he got to his feet and started for the far side of the room. Four or five of the prisoners immediately surrounded him.

"Who's top man now?" demanded one of them and slapped his face. Two more struck him. They were pushing him around and buffeting him when I walked among them and pushed them away.

"Leave him alone," I said. "He has had enough punishment for a while. When he has recovered, if one of you wishes to take him on, that will be all right, but you can't gang up on him."

The biggest of them turned and faced me. "What have *you* got to say about it?" he demanded.

"This," I replied, and knocked him down.

He sat up and looked at me. "I was just asking," he said, and grinned a sickly grin; then everybody laughed and the tension was over. After this, we got along famously—all of us, even Pho Lar; and I found them all rather decent men. Long imprisonment and the knowledge that they were facing death had frayed their nerves; but what had followed my advent had cleared the air, much as a violent electrical

storm does. After that there was a lot of laughing and talking.

I inquired if any of them were from Zan Dar's country—Zanor, but none of them was. Several of them knew where it was, and one scratched a rough map of part of Jupiter on the wall of our cell to show me where Zanor was located. "But much good it will do you to know," he said.

"One never can tell," I replied.

They had told me what I was to expect at the graduating exercises, and I gave the subject considerable thought. I did not propose attending a Morgor commencement in the role of a willing sacrifice.

"How many of you men are expert swordsmen?" I asked.

About half of them claimed to be, but it is a failing of fighting men to boast of their prowess. Not of all fighting men, but of many—usually those with the least to boast of. I wished that I had some means of determining which were really good.

"Of course we can't get hold of any swords," I said, "but if we had some sticks about the length of swords, we could soon find out who were the best swordsmen among us."

"What good would that do us?" asked one.

"We could give those Morgors a run for their money," I said, "and make them pay for their own graduation."

"The slave who brings our food is from my country," said Han Du. "I think he might smuggle a couple of sticks in to us. He is a good fellow. I'll ask him when he comes."

Pho Lar had said nothing about his swordsmanship; so, as he had proved himself a great boaster, I felt that he was not a swordsman at all. I was sorry, as he was by far the most powerful of all the Savator prisoners; and he was tall, too. With a little skill, he

should have proved a most formidable swordsman. Han Du never boasted about anything; but he said that in his country the men were much given to sword play, so I was counting on him.

FINALLY, Han Du's compatriot smuggled in a couple of wooden rods about the length of a longsword; and I went to work to ascertain how my fellow prisoners stacked up as swordsmen. Most of them were good; a few were excellent; Han Du was magnificent; and, much to everyone's surprise, Pho Lar was superb. He gave me one of the most strenuous workouts I have ever had before I could touch him. It must have taken men nearly an hour to disarm him. He was one of the greatest swordsmen I had ever faced.

Since our altercation upon my induction to their company, Pho Lar had kept much to himself. He seldom spoke, and I thought he might be brooding and planning on revenge. I had to find out just where he stood, as I could not take any chances on treachery or even half-hearted co-operation.

I took Pho Lar aside after our passage with the wooden sticks. I put my cards squarely on the table. "My plan," I said, "requires as many good swordsmen as I can get. You are one of the finest I have ever met, but you may think that you have reason to dislike me and therefore be unwilling to give me your full support. I cannot use any man who will not follow me and obey me even to death. How about it?"

"I will follow wherever you lead," he said. "Here is my hand on it—if you will take my hand in friendship."

"I am glad to do it."

As we grasped hands, he said, "If I had known a man like you years ago,

I should not have been the fool that I have been. You may count on me to my last drop of blood, and before you and I die we shall have shown the Morgors something that they will never forget. They think that they are great swordsmen, but after they have seen you in action they will have their doubts. I can scarcely wait for the time."

I was impressed by Pho Lar's protestations. I felt that he was sincere, but I could not disabuse my mind of my first impression of him—that he was at heart an arrant coward. But perhaps, facing death, he would fight as a cornered rat fights. If he did, and didn't lose his head, he would wreak havoc on the Morgors.

There were twenty of us in that cell. No longer did time drag heavily. It passed quickly in practice with our two wooden rods. Han Du, Pho Lar, and I, acting as instructors, taught the others what tricks of swordsmanship we knew until we were twenty excellent swordsmen. Several were outstanding.

We discussed several plans of action. We knew that, if custom prevailed, we should be pitted against forty young Morgor cadets striving to win to the warrior caste. We decided to fight in pairs, each of our ten best swordsmen being paired with one of the ten less proficient, but this pairing was to follow an initial charge by the first ten, with our team mates close behind us. We hoped thus to eliminate many of the Morgors in the first few moments of the encounter, thus greatly reducing the odds against us. Perhaps we of the first ten overestimated our prowess. Only time would tell.

There was some nervousness among the prisoners, due, I think, to the uncertainty as to when we should be called upon to face those unequal odds.

Each knew that some of us would die. If any survived, we had only rumor to substantiate our hope that they would be set free; and no man there trusted the Morgors. Every footfall in the corridor brought silence to the cell, with every eye fixed upon the door.

AT LONG last our anxiety was relieved: a full company of warriors came to escort us to the field where we were to fight. I glanced quickly around at the prisoners' faces. Many were smiling and there were sighs of relief. I felt greatly encouraged.

We were taken to a rectangular field with tiers of seats on each of its four sides. The stands were crowded. Thousands of eyes stared from the hollow sockets of grinning skulls. It might have been a field day in Hell. There was no sound. There were no bands. There were no flying flags—no color. We were given swords and herded together at one end of the field. An official gave us our instructions.

"When the cadets come on the field at the far end, you will advance and engage them." That was all.

"And what of those of us who survive?" I asked.

"None of you will survive, creature," he replied.

"We understood that those who survived would be given their freedom," I insisted.

"None of you will survive," he repeated.

"Would you like to place a little bet on that?"

"None of your impudence, creature!" The fellow was getting angry.

"But suppose one of us should survive?" I demanded.

"In that case his life would be spared and he would be allowed to continue in slavery, but none has ever survived these exercises. The cadets

are on the field!" he cried. "Go to your deaths, worms!"

"To your station, worms!" I commanded. The prisoners laughed as they took their allotted positions: the first ten in the front line, each with his partner behind him. I was near the center of the line. Han Du and Pho Lar were on the flanks. We marched forward as we had practiced it in our cell, all in step, the men in the rear rank giving the cadence by chanting, "Death to the Morgors!" over and over. We kept intervals and distance a little greater than the length of an extended sword arm and sword.

It was evident that the Morgors had never seen anything like that at a commencement exercise, for I could hear the hollow sound of their exclamations of surprise arising from the stands; and the cadets advancing to meet us were seemingly thrown into confusion. They were spread out in pairs in a line that extended almost all the way across the field, and it suddenly became a very ragged line. When we were about twenty-five feet from this line, I gave the command, "Charge!"

We ten, hitting the center of their line, had no odds against us: the Morgors had spread their line too thin. They saw swordsmanship in those first few seconds such as I'll warrant no Morgor ever saw before. Ten Morgors lay dead or dying on the field, as five of our first ten wheeled toward the right, followed by our partners; and our remaining ten men wheeled to the left.

AS WE had not lost a man in the first onslaught, each ten was now pitted against fifteen of the enemy. The odds were not so heavily against us. Taking each half of the Morgor line on its flank, as we now were, gave us a great advantage; and we took heavy toll of them before those on

the far flanks could get into action, with the result that we were presently fighting on an almost even footing, our partners having now come into action.

The Morgors fought with fanatic determination. Many of them were splendid swordsmen, but none of them was a match for any of our first ten. I caught an occasional glimpse of Pho Lar. He was magnificent. I doubt that any swordsman of any of the three worlds upon which I had fought could have touched Pho Lar, Han Du, or me with his point, and there were seven more almost as good.

Within fifteen minutes of the start of the engagement, all that remained was the mopping up of the surviving Morgors. We had lost ten men, all of the first ten swordsmen having survived. As the last of the Morgors fell, one could almost feel the deathly silence that had settled upon the audience.

The nine gathered around me. "What now?" asked Pho Lar.

"How many of you want to go back to slavery?" I asked.

"No!" shouted nine voices.

"We are the ten best swords on Eurobus," I said. "We could fight our way out of the city. You men know the country beyond. What chance would we have to escape capture?"

"There would be a chance," said Han Du. "Beyond the city, the jungle comes close. If we could make that, they might never find us."

"Good!" I said, and started at a trot toward a gate at one end of the field, the nine at my heels.

At the gateway, a handful of foolish guardsmen tried to stop us. We left them behind us, dead. Now we heard angry shouts arising from the field we had left, and we guessed that soon we should have hundreds of Morgors in pursuit.



To my astonishment, the branch coiled about my waist and swung me into the air

"Who knows the way to the nearest gate?" I demanded.

"I do," said one of my companions. "Follow me!" and he set off at a run.

As we raced through the avenues of the drear city, the angry shouts of our pursuers followed us, but we held our distance and at last arrived at one of the city gates. Here again we were confronted by armed warriors who compelled us to put up a stiff battle. The cries of the pursuing Morgors grew louder and louder. Soon all that we had gained would be lost. This must not be! I called Pho Lar and Han Du to my side and ordered the remaining seven to give us room, for the gateway was too narrow to wield their blades within it advantageously.

"This time we go through!" I shouted to my two companions as we rushed the surviving guardsmen. And we went through. They hadn't a chance against the three best swordsmen of three worlds.

Miraculous as it may seem, all ten of us won to freedom with nothing more than a few superficial scratches to indicate that we had been in a fight, but the howling Morgors were now close on our heels. If there is anything in three worlds that I hate, it is to run from a foe, but it would have been utterly stupid to have permitted several hundred angry Morgors to have overtaken me. I ran.

THE Morgors gave up the chase before we reached the jungle. Evidently they had other plans for capturing us. We did not stop until we were far into the tropical verdure of a great forest, then we paused to discuss the future and to rest, and we needed rest.

That forest! I almost hesitate to describe it, so weird, so unearthly was it.

Almost wholly deprived of sunlight, the foliage was pale, pale with a death-like pallor, tinged with rose where the reflected light of the fiery volcanoes filtered through. But this was by far its least uncanny aspect: the limbs of the trees moved like living things. They writhed and twined—myriad, snakelike things. I had scarcely noticed them until we halted. Suddenly one dropped down and wrapped itself about me. Smiling, I sought to disengage it. I stopped smiling: I was as helpless as a babe encircled by the trunk of an elephant. The thing started to lift me from the ground, and just then Han Du saw and leaped forward with drawn sword. He grasped one of my legs, and at the same time sprang upward and struck with the keen edge of his blade, severing the limb that had seized me. We dropped to the ground together.

"What the devil!" I exclaimed. "What is it? and why did it do that?"

Han Du pointed up. I looked. Above me, at the end of a strong stem, was a huge blossom—a horrible thing! In its center was a large mouth armed with many teeth, and above the mouth were two staring, lidless eyes.

"I had forgotten," said Han Du, "that you are not of Eurobus. Perhaps you have no such trees as these in your world."

"We certainly have not," I assured him. "A few that eat insects, perhaps, like Venus's-flytrap, but no man-eaters."

"You must always be on your guard when in one of our forests," he warned me. "These trees are living, carnivorous animals. They have a nervous system and a brain, and it is generally believed that they have a language and talk with one another."

Just then a hideous scream broke from above us. I looked up, expecting to see some strange, Jupiterian beast

above me, but there was nothing but the writhing limbs and the staring eyes of the great blossoms of the man-trees.

Han Du laughed. "Their nervous systems are of a low order," he said, "and their reactions correspondingly slow and sluggish. It took all this time for the pain of my sword cut to reach the brain of the blossom to which that limb belongs?"

"A man's life would never be safe for a moment in such a forest," I commented.

"One has to be constantly on guard," admitted Han Du. "If you ever have to sleep out in the woods, build a smudge. The blossoms don't like smoke. They close up, and then they cannot see to attack you. But be sure that you don't oversleep your smudge."

VEGETABLE life on Jupiter, practically devoid of sunlight, has developed along entirely different lines from that on earth. Nearly all of it has some animal attributes and nearly all all of it is carnivorous, the smaller plants devouring insects, the larger, in turn, depending upon the larger animals for sustenance on up to the maneaters such as I had encountered and those which Han Du said caught and devoured even the hugest animals that exist upon this strange planet.

We posted a couple of guards, who also kept smudges burning, and the rest of us lay down to sleep. One of the men had a chronometer, and this was used to inform the men on guard when to awaken their reliefs. In this way, we all took turns watching and sleeping.

When all had slept, the smudges were allowed to burn more brightly, the men cut limbs from the living trees, sliced them and roasted them. They tasted much like veal. Then we talked over our plans for the future. It was de-

cided that we should split up into parties of two or three and scatter; so that some of us at least might have a chance to escape recapture. They said that the Morgors would hunt us down for a long time. I felt that we would be much safer remaining together, as we were ten undefeatable sword-arms; but as the countries from which my companions came were widely scattered, and as, naturally, each wished if possible to return to his own home, it was necessary that we separate.

It chanced that Han Du's country lay in the general direction of Zanor, as did Pho Lar's, so we three bid good-bye to the others and left them. How I was to reach faraway Zanor on a planet of twenty-three billion square miles of area, I was at some loss to conceive. So was Han Du. He told me that I would be welcome in his country—if we were fortunate enough to reach it; but I assured him that I should never cease to search for Zanor and my mate.

CHAPTER IX

I SHALL not bore you with an account of that part of my odyssey which finally brought me to one of the cities of Han Du's country. We kept as much to cover as we could, since we knew that if Morgors were searching for us, they would be flying low in invisible ships. Forests offered us our best protection from discovery, but there were wide plains to cross, rivers to swim, mountains to climb.

In this world without night, it was difficult to keep account of time; but it seemed to me that we must have travelled for months. Pho Lar remained with us for a great deal of the time, but finally he had to turn away in the direction of his own country. We were sorry to lose him, as he had developed

into a splendid companion; and we should miss his sword, too.

We had met no men, but had had several encounters with wild beasts—creatures of hideous, unearthly appearance, both powerful and voracious. I soon realized the inadequacy of our swords as a sole means of defense; so we fashioned spears of a bamboolike growth that seemed wholly vegetable. I also taught Han Du and Pho Lar how to make bows and arrows and to use them. We found them of great advantage in our hunting of smaller animals and birds for food. In the forests, we subsisted almost wholly on the meat of the man-tree.

At last Han Du and I came within sight of an ocean. "We are home," he said. "My city lies close beside the sea." I saw no city.

We had come down out of some low hills, and were walking across a narrow coastal plain. Han Du was several yards to my right, when I suddenly bumped into something solid—solid as a brick wall; but there was nothing there! The sudden collision had caused me to step back. I stretched out my hands, and felt what seemed to be a solid wall barring my way, yet only a level expanse of bare ground stretched before me down to the shore where erratic combers surged at cross purposes along the beach. I said bare ground, but the ground was not entirely bare. It was dotted, here and there, with strange plants—a simple, leafless stock a foot or two tall bearing a single fuzzy blossom at its top.

I looked around for Han Du. He had disappeared! He had just vanished like a punctured soap bubble. All up and down the shore there was no place into which he could have vanished, nothing behind which he could have hidden, no hole in the ground into which he might have darted. I was

baffled. I scratched my head in perplexity, as I started on again toward the beach only to once more bump into the wall that was not there.

I put my hands against the invisible wall and followed it. It curved away from me. Foot by foot, I pursued my tantalizing investigation. After a while I was back right where I had started from. It seemed that I had run into an invisible tower of solid air. I started off in a new direction toward the beach, avoiding the obstacle which had obstructed my way. After a dozen paces I ran into another; then I gave up—at least temporarily.

Presently I called Han Du's name aloud, and almost instantly he appeared a short distance from me. "What kind of a game is this?" I demanded. "I bump into a wall of solid air and when I look for you, you are not anywhere, you have disappeared."

HAN DU laughed. "I keep forgetting that you are a stranger in this world," he said. "We have come to the city in which I live. I just stepped into my home to greet my family. That is why you could not see me." As he spoke, a woman appeared beside him, and a little child. They seemed to materialize out of thin air. Had I come to a land of disembodied spirits who had the power to materialize? I could scarcely believe it, as there was nothing ghostly nor ethereal about Han Du.

"This is O Ala, my mate," said Han Du. "O Ala, this is John Carter, Prince of Helium. To him we owe my escape from the Morgors."

O Ala extended her hand to me. It was a firm, warm hand of flesh and blood. "Welcome, John Carter," she said. "All that we have is yours."

It was a sweet gesture of hospitality; but as I looked around, I could not see

that they had anything. "Where is the city?" I asked.

They both laughed. "Come with us," said O Ala. She led the way, apparently around an invisible corner; and there, before me, I saw an open doorway in thin air. Through the doorway, I could see the interior of a room. "Come in," invited O Ala, and I followed her into a commodious, circular apartment. Han Du followed and closed the door. The roof of the apartment was a dome perhaps twenty feet high at its center. It was divided into four rooms by sliding hangings which could be closed or drawn back against the wall.

"Why couldn't I see the house from the outside?" I asked.

"It is plastered on the outside with sands of invisibility which we find in great quantities along the beach," explained Han Du. "It is about our only protection against the Morgors. Every house in the city is thus protected, a little over five hundred of them."

So I had walked into a city of five hundred houses and seen only an expanse of open beach beside a restless sea. "But where are the people?" I asked. "Are they, too, invisible?"

"Those who are not away, hunting or fishing, are in their homes," explained O Ala. "We do not venture out any more than is necessary, lest Morgors be cruising around in their invisible ships and see us; thus discovering our city."

"If any of us should be thus caught out," said Han Du, "he must run away from the city as fast as he can, for if he entered a house, the Morgors would immediately know that there was a city here. It is the sacrifice that each of us is in honor bound to make for the safety of all, for he who runs is almost invariably caught and carried away, unless he chooses to fight and die."

"Tell me," I said to Han Du, "how in the world you found your house, when you could not see it or any other house?"

"You noticed the umpalla plants growing throughout the city?" he asked.

"I noticed some plants, but I saw no city."

They both laughed again. "We are so accustomed to it that it does not seem at all strange to us," said O Ala, "but I can understand that it might prove very confusing to a stranger. You see, each plant marks the location of a house. By long experience, each of us has learned the exact location of every house in the city in relation to every other house."

I REMAINED for what may have been five or six days of earth time in the home of Han Du and O Ala. I met many of their friends, all of whom were gracious and helpful to me in every way that they could be. I was furnished with maps of considerable areas of the planet, parts of which, I was told, were still unexplored even by the Morgors. Of greatest value to me was the fact that Zanor appeared on one of the maps, which also showed that a vast ocean lay between me and the country in which I believed Dejah Thoris to be. How I was to cross this ocean neither I nor my new found friends could offer a suggestion, other than the rather mad scheme I envisioned of building a sail boat and trusting myself to the mad caprices of an unknown sea perhaps swarming with dangerous reptiles. But this I at last decided was the only hope I had for being again reunited with my princess.

There was a forest several miles along the coast from the city, where I might hope to find trees suitable for the construction of my craft. My

friends tried their best to dissuade me; but when they found that I was determined to carry out my plan, they loaned me tools; and a dozen of them volunteered to accompany me to the forest and help me build my boat.

At last all was in readiness; and, accompanied by my volunteer helpers, I stepped from the house of Han Du to start the short march to the forest.

Scarcely were we in the open when one of my companions cried, "Morgors!" Whereupon the Savators scattered in all directions away from their city.

"Run, John Carter!" shouted Han Du, but I did not run.

A few yards distant, I saw the open doorway in the side of an invisible ship; and I saw six or seven Morgors emerge from it. Two rushed toward me; the others scattered in pursuit of the Savators. In that instant a new plan flashed across my mind. Hope, almost extinct, leaped to life again.

I whipped my sword from its scabbard and leaped forward to meet the first of the oncoming Morgors, thanking God that there were only two of them, as delay might easily wreck my hopes. There was no finesse in my attack: it was stark, brutal murder; but my conscience did not bother me as I drew my sword from the heart of the first Morgor and faced the second.

The second fellow gave me a little more trouble, as he had been forewarned by the fate of his companion; and, too, he presently recognized me. That made him doubly wary. He commenced to howl to the others, who were pursuing the Savators, to come back and help him, bellowing that here was the creature from Garobus who had led the slaughter at the graduating exercises. From the corner of an eye, I saw that two of them had heard and were returning. I must hurry!

The fellow now fought wholly on the defensive in order to gain time for the others to join him. I had no mind to permit this, and I pressed him hard, often laying myself wide open—a great swordsman could have killed me easily. At last I reached him with a mighty cut that almost severed his head from his body; then, with only a quick glance behind me to see how close the others were, I leaped toward the open doorway of the otherwise invisible ship, a Morgor close upon my heels.

WITH naked blade still in my hand, I sprang aboard and closed the door behind me; then I wheeled to face whatever of their fellows had been left aboard to guard the craft. The fools had left no one. I had the ship all to myself; and as I ran to the controls I heard the Morgors beating upon the door, angrily demanding that I open it. They must have taken me for a fool, too.

A moment later the ship rose into the air, and I was away upon one of the strangest adventures of my life—navigating an unknown planet in an invisible craft. And I had much to learn about navigation on Jupiter. By watching Vorion, I had learned how to start and stop a Morgor ship, how to gain or lose altitude, and how to cloak the ship in invisibility; but the instruments upon the panel before me were all entirely meaningless to me. The hieroglyphs of the Morgors were quite unintelligible. I had to work it all out for myself.

Opening all the ports, I had a clear field of vision. I could see the shore I had just left, and I knew the direction of the coastline. Han Du had explained this to me. It ran due north and south at the point. The ocean lay to the west of it. I found an instrument which might easily have been a com-

pass; when I altered the course of the ship, I saw that it was a compass. I now had my bearings as closely as it was possible for me to get them. I consulted my map and discovered that Zanor lay almost exactly southeast; so out across that vast expanse of ocean I turned the prow of my ship.

I was free. I had escaped the Morgors unharmed. In Zanor, Dejah Thoris was safe among friends. That I should soon be with her, I had no doubt. We had experienced another amazing adventure. Soon we should be reunited. I had not the slightest doubt of my ability to find Zanor. Perhaps it is because I am always so sure of myself that I so often accomplish the seemingly impossible.

How long I was in crossing that dismal ocean, I do not know. With Jupiter whirling on its axis nearly three times as fast as earth, and with no sun, moon, nor stars, I could not measure time.

I saw no ship upon that entire vast expanse of water, but I did see life—plenty of it. And I saw terrific storms that buffeted my craft, tossing it about like a feather. But that was nothing compared with what I saw below me as the storms at the height of their fury lashed the surface of the waters. I realized then how suicidal would have been my attempt to cross that terrible ocean in the frail craft that I had planned to build. I saw waves that hurled the mighty monsters of the deep as though they had been tiny minnows. No ship could have lived in such seas. I realized then why I saw no shipping on this great Jupiterian ocean.

But at last I sighted land ahead—and what land! Zan Dar had told me of the mighty mountains of Zanor rearing their forested heads twenty miles above the level of the sea, and it was such mountains that lay ahead of me.

If I had reckoned accurately, this should be Zanor; and these breath-taking mountains assured me that I had not gone wrong.

I KNEW from Zan Dar's explanation, just where to search for the stamping grounds of his tribe—a wild mountain tribe of fighting men. They lay in a land of meadows and ravines on the east slope of the highest mountain and at an altitude of only about ten miles, or about half way to the summit. Here the air is only slightly thinner than at sea level, as the cloud envelope retains the atmosphere of Jupiter as though it were held in a bag, permitting none of it to escape, while the rapid revolution of the planet tends to throw the atmosphere far up from the surface.

Most fortunate was I in coming upon the village of Zan Dar with little or no difficulty. Entirely invisible, I hovered above it, dropping down slowly. I knew that the moment they saw a Morgor ship, they would disappear into the forests that surrounded the village, waiting there to rush out upon any Morgors who might be foolish enough to leave the ship after landing.

There were people in plain view of me in the village as I dropped to within fifty feet of the ground. I stopped the ship and hung there; then I demagnetized the hull; and, as the ship became instantly visible, I leaped to the door and pushed it open; so that they could see that I was no Morgor. I shouted that I was a friend of Zan Dar,

They called to me to land, and I brought the ship slowly toward the ground. My lonely voyage was over. I had surmounted seemingly unsurmountable obstacles and I had reached my goal. Soon my incomparable Dejah Thoris would be again in my arms.

THE END

AMAZING FACTS

By A. MORRIS

Odd bits of truth exist in our daily life which are perhaps even more amazing than fiction itself

ROBOT MINE LAYERS

A ROBOT submarine that requires no crew but works by remote control has been invented by Leonid A. Dunjeff of New York City and is covered by patent No. 2,191,879.

The mine layer moves entirely submerged except for an intake pipe which supplies the motors with air and resembles a periscope in appearance. By a special device, the submarine is confined to certain levels of travel and it rises or lowers within this level by means of a control that forces out or permits water to enter the tanks. An automatic pilot steers the ship and regulates its speed. By means of this same mechanism, the mines towed under water by the ship are automatically released at the desired position.

This device, the patent of which has been assigned to the Commercial Ingredients Corporation of New York City, is especially useful since it removes so much of the dangers formerly attending the hazardous job of mine laying.

Since it requires no crew, if it should blow up by some accident, the only loss will be the cost of the ship—with no loss of life.

* * *

SENSITIVITY PLUS

A CURRENT detecting device has been developed which is so sensitive that it can detect .000,000,000,000,000,000,001 amperes. This infinitesimal amount of current corresponds to the current that would be produced by a single electron passing down a wire once every five minutes.

* * *

INDIAN DEAD TOWN FOUND

A RCHAEOLOGISTS in southwest North Carolina made the mysterious discovery of a dead town that Indians of long ago covered with a white sand shroud.

Excavations have revealed that early Indians settling at this place built a strange temple of stone and wood with a wide stone bench around it. The roof of this temple collapsed, and the wreckage was then covered with earth, making a small mound. This mound and the surrounding village became the dead town, which was buried later in sand. And then, another Indian group

used the mound as a core for a greater, taller mound with temples erected on top, and in the mound they interred six bodies—probably religious sacrifices.

It is believed that a large town which later grew up over the town grave was Guasili, where De Soto visited Cherokee Indians. De Soto may have viewed this mound when it was topped by these temples, reached by stairs of log.

* * *

NEW TEXAS MOSQUITO

A MOSQUITO known to entomologists by the technical name *Deinocerites Spanius*, hitherto known only in Panama, has appeared on the coast near Brownsville, Texas.

Dr. Frank N. Fisk of the University of California, who has made a study of the insect's peculiar habits, believes that it may have traveled to its new home by plane.

If it is a relation to our own pesty mosquito, one could never tell it, for the invader is exceedingly retiring, does not bite human beings, and is not known to carry any disease. Its larvae live in the moles made in the beach by the innumerable fiddler crabs that swarm along the Gulf shores. The adults mate in confined spaces, and prefer to feed on cold-blooded animals.

* * *

THULIUM IN SUN'S ATMOSPHERE

DR. ARTHUR S. KING reports that possible existence in the atmosphere of the sun of thulium has been found. Thulium is one of the rarest elements known on earth.

Light from a small sample of the chemical was examined in the electric furnace where the temperature is about the same as that in the atmosphere of a cool star. Nine radiations emitted by thulium were found to check with unidentified radiations from the sun.

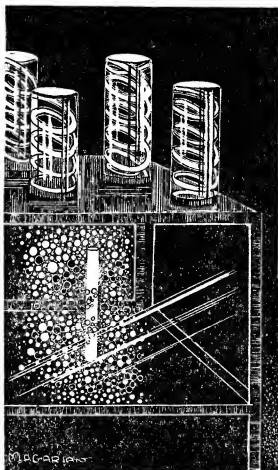
Positive identification could not be announced until additional study had been made of the thulium atom, said Dr. King.

Thulium was discovered by Per T. Cleve, a Swedish chemist, in 1879. It has an atomic weight of 169.4, an atomic number of 69, and its chemical symbol is Tm.

VISITOR TO EARTH

By
P. F. COSTELLO

The advertisement could have been a gag; but the Axis and a reporter thought otherwise.



I WAS sitting at my desk in the city room of the *Washington Chronicle*, glancing through the paper, when my eye landed on an advertisement tucked away in the bottom of the Business Opportunities column.

The ad was simple and curt; it said: "*Secret Weapon Available—Reasonable Contact Mart Shean, 2250 Constitution*"

I took my feet down from my desk and began scratching my head. This was obviously a gag of some sort but, with the country at war, things like this just weren't funny any more.

My city editor, Williams, walked over to my desk with a copy of the paper in his hand. He was scowling under his green eyeshade.

"Have you seen this?" he said, shoving the ad section under my nose. I noticed that he had circled with blue pencil the same ad that had caught my attention.

"Yeah," I said. "Is this the first day it's been run?"



"This," said the stranger, "is the secret weapon I mentioned."

Williams shook his head. "It was in yesterday and the day before. All the papers in town have carried it." He tapped a pencil against his teeth and frowned. "What do you think it is, Mac?"

"I haven't the remotest idea," I said truthfully and cheerfully. "Apparently it's a gag of some sort. Was it phoned in?"

"Yes," Williams said. "I checked on that. I think there might be a story behind this somewhere. At least, a good humorous feature. Get on it, Mac."

He waddled away and I sighed and prepared to go to work. I sharpened a pencil, put on my hat and left the building of the *Chronicle*. I took a cab to the address listed in the ad. It was a small office building in an outlying business building.

I consulted the building directory and found a Mart Shean listed on the twelfth floor. That was my man.

The glazed glass door of Mart Shean's office was blank except for his name. I stood there uncertainly for a moment and then put my hand on the knob. As I opened the door I heard footsteps behind me. I glanced over my shoulder and saw a tall dark man with a slouch hat walking toward me along the otherwise deserted corridor. The slouch hat obscured most of his face and my only impression was of a lean narrow jaw and full-lipped mouth. The man paused an instant when he saw me. His hands were jammed into the side pockets of his coat and he seemed to be studying me with peculiar intensity. Finally he turned and walked quickly back down the corridor and disappeared around the corner.

I shrugged and opened the door of the office. A mild pleasant voice said:

"Won't you please come in?"

I looked and saw a small, neatly

dressed man sitting behind a desk in the corner of the room. The office was small and comfortably furnished. Sun poured in symmetrical slits through a venetian blind that covered the only window and there were several extra chairs arranged about the office. There was a rather large closet in one corner and its door was closed. From the physical appearance of the office it was impossible to tell just what Mart Shean's business was.

I turned my attention to the man behind the desk who was regarding me with bright pleasant eyes. He was small and frail but he somehow gave the impression of perfect health. Possibly it was because of the redness of his skin and the shining luster of his dark, carefully combed hair. His ears were small and pointed and his lips were slightly full. But his eyes held my attention. They seemed to be of one solid color, a deep grayish-green, and there was a peculiar suggestion of infinite intelligence in their depths.

"Won't you please sit down?" he said politely. His voice was soft and smooth and absolutely without accent. It would have been impossible to judge the man's nationality from his inflection or voice.

"Thank you," I said. I sat down, facing him. I was at a loss for a moment. There was something strangely disturbing in the little man's quiet stare. I said, "Are you Mark Shean?"

He nodded. "Yes, I am Mark Shean." But he didn't pronounce the 'k' and he slid the two words together. He continued to stare brightly at me. "What can I do for you?"

I unfolded the ad section of the *Chronicle* and tossed it on his desk.

"I came to see you about your ad," I said.

"Ah, that is excellent," he murmured. "Are you from the War Department?"

"Not exactly," I said.

He looked disappointed. "I was expecting someone from there," he said. "Possibly their representative will come later."

"Ah—yes," I said. "They're pretty busy over there now." I was beginning to feel slightly uneasy. The interview wasn't going quite as I'd planned. I was supposed to be humoring some nut or practical joker to get a story out of him, but I had the strange sensation that the shoe was on the other foot.

"And what can I do for you?" Mark Shean asked politely.

"Well, I'm a newspaper man," I said. "Frankly I was intrigued by your ad. I'd like to get the details of your secret weapon. You do have one, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. I'm happy that my ad attracted you. You see I haven't had much experience with that sort of thing and I was afraid that I hadn't done it correctly. Since no one came to investigate I thought possibly that it was my fault."

"Oh, no," I said. "But tell me, why didn't you take this weapon of yours directly to the War Department?"

Mark Shean frowned. "I wasn't sure that that would be the thing to do. You see I'm a stranger here on Earth and I didn't know the proper procedure under the circumstances. I—"

"Pardon me, but—"

"Yes?"

I swallowed. The room seemed a little close.

"Did you say you were a stranger here on Earth?" I asked.

"Why yes," the little man said. "I've only been here a few days. Naturally I knew considerably of your customs before I arrived, but there are things I find puzzling. That is only natural, I suppose."

"Yes," I said weakly. "As you say, that's only natural." I took out my handkerchief and mopped my brow. I realized I was probably talking to the great-granddaddy of all mental cases. This guy was nuttier than a fruit cake. That much was obvious from his remarks, but his calm air of assurance and his baffling poise made me doubt the evidence of my ears. Maybe *I* was nuts! I'd toyed with that idea before, but this seemed a good time to think about it seriously.

"Where is your secret weapon?" I asked.

"In the closet," he answered.

"What does it do?" I asked inanely. I found myself thinking dizzily of the old gag about the two loonies and the hat. One nut asks the other to guess what he's hiding under his hat. The second nut says a horse. The first loony looks carefully under the hat and then asks, "What color?"

I was getting to that stage when I started asking serious questions about the potentialities of secret weapons in the closets of normal business offices. But the queer thing was that the little man's attitude of confidence and certainty made it seem quite possible that there *was* a secret weapon in the closet of his office.

"In your ad you said the terms would be 'reasonable,'" I said. "What do you mean by that?"

"That wasn't quite what I meant," the little man said, frowning. "I mean to give the weapon to the Government of the United States. The word 'reasonable' was an unhappy selection; another of the mistakes I can't quite help. You see everything is so very strange here."

We were back to that again.

"Your name is Mark Shean, isn't it?" I asked. "That doesn't sound particularly foreign."

The little man looked puzzled for an instant.

"Not Mar-k Shean," he said. "Marsh-ean. You do not pronounce it correctly."

"Marshean?" I asked. "Is that better?"

"Much."

I felt as if I were getting somewhere. Why, I don't know.

"Now," I said briskly, "suppose you tell me something about this secret weapon of yours, Mr. Marsh-ean."

"I will be happy to, but my name is not 'Marsh-ean,'" the little man said gently.

"But you said—"

"My name is Ang-Ar," the little man went on imperturbably. "'Marsh-ean' is simply what you would call an adjective. It describes the place from where I come."

"But you said you were Marshean!" I said, bewildered.

"I am," the little man said firmly. "I am Ang-Ar, a citizen of Mars."

"Mars!"

"Yes. I came from Mars and I shall return there when my work here is completed. Why, is that so surprising?"

I glanced over my shoulder to make sure that I was close to the door. My little chum, despite his benign exterior, might be violent.

"No, that isn't surprising," I said in a nice soothing voice, "We've been more or less expecting someone from Mars to drop in one of these days. After all, there's nothing like neighborliness. Tell me, how were things on good old Mars when you left?"

"Everything was excellent," the little red-faced man who called himself Ang-Ar said pleasantly. "It has been many thousands of years since our planet has been disturbed by war and disease and famine. If you will pardon my saying so, you here have not

been so fortunate. That, incidentally, is the reason for my visit. We have long felt that we should pass along to the people of Earth some of our scientific developments. However, we have been afraid of disturbing your normal growth and culture. We agreed that it might be better to allow you to solve your problems as we have solved ours. But now that you are engaged in a vast and horrible civil war we feel that we must help those factions which are fighting the ruthless enemies who would crush out human rights forever on this planet."

I was a little dazed by the simple and powerful sincerity in Ang-Ar's quiet voice. The man might be as mad as a hatter, but there was something about him that defied ridicule.

"So you came down with a secret weapon to help us," I said weakly.

"Yes," Ang-Ar said. "I wasn't exactly sure how to proceed but I knew from my observation of your planet that advertising is one of the principal developments of your civilization. All of your commerce and business is expedited with advertising; so I decided to simply advertise the fact that I had a secret weapon. I have been waiting three days now and I was becoming somewhat discouraged. Do you think I have handled this matter in the correct manner?"

"Why, of course," I said reassuringly. "After all, if a man has a secret weapon to dispose of, the obvious thing to do is advertise."

Ang-Ar beamed. "I am happy to hear you say that. But I can't understand why the ad hasn't brought results. I expected some indication of interest from the Navy or War Departments. I thought they would investigate an offer such as mine immediately."

I didn't know just what to say. This

little guy who thought he was a Martian had a peculiar way of setting me back on my heels. His conversation sounded like something that might have originated in a padded cell, but his obvious air of conviction and intelligence was baffling. It was unnerving to hear an apparently rational creature calmly discussing the situation on Mars.

I shook my head and ran a hand over my forehead.

"You say the secret weapon is in the closet?" I asked.

"Well, not exactly," the little man smiled. "The weapon is on Mars."

"I see," I said. "Well, that's a nice safe place for it."

"But I will show it to you," Ang-Ar said. "It will only take me a few seconds to have it sent here."

"Free Rural Delivery, I suppose," I said. This was getting worse all the time. The gentlemen with the strait jackets should know about this case.

Ang-Ar stood up and walked to the closet and opened the door.

"Perhaps you'd like to see this," he said. "You might find it rather interesting."

"Sure," I said. "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

I stepped around beside him and received a definite surprise. There was a small gleaming machine in the closet supported on a metal table. The machine was only about a foot square. The front of it was glass covered and I was able to peer into a small empty compartment. A row of dials was built into the base of the machine and there were four intricate coils on top. I don't know why but the thing *looked* impressive. I could see at a glance that it wasn't something built on a tinkerer's cellar work bench. The shining metal frame work and the row of rheostats were the creation of a highly skilled machinist equipped with the

best of tools. That much was obvious.

I looked at my little friend with increased respect.

"This is an elementary device which we perfected many centuries ago," he explained. "With it we are able to break down the atomic structure of matter and then transfer the electronic units to any spot we desire for reassembly."

"In other words this gadget can send solid matter through space," I said. "It must come in handy at times."

"This is one of those times," Ang-Ar said, a touch of dryness in his voice. "The weapon which I intend to place at the disposal of your government is on Mars. Specifically it is in a machine corresponding to the one you see here. When I signal Mars my colleagues will de-atomize the weapon and flash it across space. We should have it in a very few minutes."

"How nice," I said weakly.

"It is convenient," Ang-Ar said placidly. He twisted one of the small black dials to the left. "That's all there is to it," he said. "We won't have long to wait."

For the men from the booby hatch, I thought, but I didn't say anything. To be truthful I was becoming more and more puzzled.

Ang-Ar made another adjustment with one of the rheostats and then pointed to the glass fronted compartment.

"Watch now," he murmured.

I bent over and peered into the empty compartment. But I suddenly realized it wasn't empty any more. In the exact center of the enclosure there was a misty line of blue bubbles forming. They hung suspended in the air without any apparent support and with each second they thickened and assumed more definite shape and solidity.

"What is it?" I demanded. I had my

face shoved up to the glass like an inquisitive goldfish and I could see that the object materializing in the case was a slender tube, black in color and about the size of a fountain pen.

"That is the weapon," Ang-Ar explained. "Do not be disappointed by its innocuous appearance. I assure you it is quite effective."

"What does it do?" I asked. I was getting excited.

"I shall give you a demonstration," Ang-Ar said.

He snapped a switch on the side of the machine, opened the glass door of the small compartment and removed the slender black tube.

"You will notice," he said, holding the object up for my inspection, "that there is a switch on one end of the tube. When this is turned on a powerful invisible ray emanates from the barrel end of the weapon. The device is simple enough to be operated by a child but that does not alter its effectiveness."

"What kind of a ray is it?"

"A disintegrating ray, powerful enough to de-atomize any known element." Ang-Ar replied.

"Just like Buck Rogers," I murmured. I was returning to sanity again. For a minute I had been really impressed, but—a disintegrating ray!

Ang-Ar ignored my facetious comment and picked up a heavy bronze ash tray from his desk.

"This will do for a demonstration," he said. "You can see that this metal is solid and durable." He set it back on the desk and pointed the tube at it. "Now watch closely to what happens when it is exposed to the effect of the ray."

He flicked on the switch and nothing happened. There was no blue lights or crackling of energy and there was no apparent effect on the bronze ash tray.

And I felt more than ever like the city's supreme chump for wasting this much time listening to the babbling of an out-and-out crack-pot.

"Something the matter?" I inquired politely.

Ang-Ar was imperturbable. "No, it takes a few seconds for the ray to reach full strength."

"Oh, sure," I said, yawning slightly. "But I've got plenty of time. I—"

"There!" Ang-Ar said.

I swung my eyes back to the bronze ash tray and a sudden flash of excitement swept over me. The bronze tray was glowing a fiery, cherry red and, as I stared bug-eyed at the spectacle, it suddenly crumbled away into flaky ash. In a second nothing was left, even the white residue of ash dissolving and disappearing.

"You see," Ang-Ar said quite calmly, "that's all there is to it."

He flicked off the switch on the slender tube and dropped it into his pocket. He smiled at me. "Are you convinced now? Your scepticism has been quite apparent."

I took a deep slow breath. My eyes were still riveted unbelievably on the spot where the bronze ash tray had rested. I couldn't quite make myself believe that my eyes were telling the truth.

"It's very remarkable," I said cautiously. I ran my hand over the surface of the desk. It was uncharred and apparently in no way affected by the blast of energy that had disintegrated the ash tray.

"No," Ang-Ar said, "the desk has not been damaged in any way. The weapon has a high degree of control and its ray only acts on the object at which it is directly aimed."

I felt somewhat dazed. I couldn't quite analyze my own feelings. If this thing were on the level it was stu-

pendous, but if it were just a gag—

"What kind of a ray is created by that weapon?" I asked.

Ang-Ar smiled. "I don't mean to sound superior but I am quite sure you wouldn't be able to understand its principle. But I have blue-prints and complete information on it all typed out and ready to give to the War Department. They should be able to have it in production in several weeks. All the materials necessary for its manufacture exist in abundance on Earth."

I was stumped. I didn't know quite what to believe.

"As you are a newspaperman," Ang-Ar said, "perhaps you could publicize my intentions and arrange an interview with the War Department for me. I would appreciate it very much if you would do this."

"Sure," I said, "I'll write a story on it." But I didn't know yet what kind of a story I was going to write.

"Thank you very much," Ang-Ar said.

"Not at all."

I shook hands with him and left him standing in the center of the office a pleased little smile on his intelligent red face. Outside in the corridor I walked to the elevator, frowning thoughtfully. A man brushed against me and I noticed, abstractedly, that it was the dark, lean-faced fellow with the black slouch hat whom I'd noticed when I had arrived. But I was too pre-occupied with my own thoughts to wonder why he was loitering about.

I went back to the office and told the chief of the details of the interview. He shoved his green eyeshade back on his forehead and grinned.

"Sounds wonderful," he said.

I frowned. "I don't know. Maybe there's something to what the guy said. I tell you, chief, I'm not sure that this is just a gag."

The chief looked at me in pained surprise.

"Are you serious?" he demanded. "Do you mean to tell me you think this crackpot actually came from Mars?"

"No, of course not," I said irritably, "but what about his weapon? I saw that thing in action and it impressed me. Maybe we should report this to the War Department instead of doing a humorous feature on it."

"That would be fine," the chief snorted. "Can't you imagine the reception we'd get if we went to the War Department with a yarn like that? Now forget this nonsense and do a yarn on this bug for the next edition."

So I shrugged and locked myself in my cubicle, put a fresh sheet of paper into my punch press and went to work. I batted out the story in less than an hour and dropped it on the boss's desk.

He read it smiling.

"This is great," he chuckled. "This is funny as the devil."

I put on my hat. "If it isn't we're all going to feel like first class chumps."

"Are you still worrying about the fact that this might be on the level?" the chief laughed. "You been working too hard, son, or else the heat's getting you. Forget about this story and go out and get yourself a nice cold glass of beer. You can put it on your expense account."

"Thanks," I said drily. I walked out of the office and the chief's idea didn't seem like a bad one when that sun hit me. I found a comparatively cool dark tavern and stood at the bar sipping a brew and worrying about—of all things—my little red-faced friend who claimed he came from Mars.

My job was done. I'd gotten the interview, written the story and that was all there was to it. I was a reporter,

not a detective or psychiatrist, so what was I worrying about? I had another beer and continued to worry. All right, supposing he did have a powerful weapon? That wasn't any business of mine. Supposing the War Department was too busy to investigate every crackpot claim, was that my affair?

Definitely not, I decided, waving for another beer.

I don't know how long I stood there, sipping beer and muttering to myself, but finally I picked up my change and walked out into the street.

It was late in the afternoon and the streets were jammed with secretaries hurrying homeward. The sun was still shining hotly. I waved to a cab and climbed in. I gave the driver the address of the building where I had met the little man from Mars.

I hadn't the faintest idea why I was going back to see him. My tongue-in-cheek story on him would be on the streets by this time; maybe he'd seen it already. But some inner compulsion was goading me on.

I wanted to talk to that little man again and, for some reason, I felt that any delay might be—well—dangerous was the word that popped into my mind but that was ridiculous.

The driver braked the car to a stop, I paid him and got out. The lobby of the building was deserted and there were several scrubwomen scouring the marble floor with stiff, soapy brushes.

I pressed the elevator button and waited impatiently until a car appeared. For some unaccountable reason I was becoming more and more jittery.

When I stepped out of the elevator I strode down the quiet deserted hall toward the office I had visited earlier in the day. The thought had occurred to me that my little chum with the disintegrator ray might have gone home.

And I wanted to talk to him as soon as possible.

There was no light visible behind the glazed door of his office but I knocked anyway. My hopes revived as I saw the shadow of a human figure moving inside the room. The shadow grew larger as it approached the door and then the knob turned and I was staring at a tall figure, with a lean frowning face, partially obscured by a black slouch hat.

"What do you want?" The man's mouth was a thin slit that seemed to open barely wide enough to let the terse words slip through. His deep shadowed eyes were watching me with hungry intensity.

I started to reply and then something halted the words. I was staring at the man in the doorway and I suddenly recognized him as the person I'd noticed loitering in the corridor earlier in the afternoon. What was he doing here in this office? That was my first suspicious thought.

Possibly he noticed my frowning stare because he moved closer to me and his eyes were hard and cold.

"Well?" he snapped. "What do you want?"

There was no point in stalling. "I want to see Mark Shean," I said. "Is he here?"

"No!" The door started to close.

"Just a minute," I said. My temper was beginning to boil. I didn't like being treated like a magazine salesman. "I had an appointment with him here tonight," I said, lying glibly. "If he's not here I'd like to know where I can reach him."

"So," the man in the doorway said softly, "you have an appointment with him, do you?"

I noticed then that he was studying me closely.

"You were here this afternoon,

weren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," I said drily. "Popular place, isn't it?"

That, for some reason, made him smile, but there was no humor in his wolfish grin. His lips merely flattened against strong white teeth.

"You recall seeing me here, don't you?" he said, rocking slowly back and forth on his heels.

"Yes," I said. "You were wearing a potted palm behind your ear and carrying a rose-colored fan. You were hard to miss."

"Won't you please come in?" he said. He opened the door and stepped aside.

I hesitated for an instant, then I stepped past him into the room. There was another man in the office, a heavily built, dull-looking young man with cropped blond hair and unwinking blue eyes.

Slouch Hat closed the door behind me and smiled at the other man.

"This gentleman has an appointment with our friend," he said. "He was here this afternoon and he was so intrigued that he came back. Isn't that interesting?"

The big young man stood up slowly and stared at me, his bovine features devoid of expression. He seemed to be measuring me with his cold eyes.

"Yes," he said in a thick voice, "that is very interesting."

"I knew you would think so," Slouch Hat murmured. He turned to me. "Now what was it you wanted to discuss with our—friend?"

I shrugged, stalling for time. There was something phony here but I couldn't figure out just what it was. "He wanted to tell me something," I said. "I haven't any idea what it was and I fail to see how it's any of your business."

"Now you mustn't adopt that attitude," Slouch Hat said, still grinning.

"You are sure you have no idea what our friend wished to discuss with you? It would be so pleasant if you could remember what it was."

"Yes, I have a pretty good idea," I said.

My eyes had seen something as Slouch Hat was talking that made an electric shiver of danger along my spine. I was stalling desperately now, groping for anything that would get me out of this office. The closet door was slightly ajar and I could see that the materialization set I had seen demonstrated that afternoon was gone. And I could see that it had been literally jerked out by the roots. Also the carpet of the office was scuffed and wrinkled and I noticed the large blond young man's collar was open and the button had been torn away.

Slouch Hat was still watching me carefully.

"What do you think our friend wanted to discuss with you?" he asked.

I frowned and looked dumb. "I think it was about the ad he's been running in the paper. You see I'm in the classified department of the *Chronicle*. I think he wanted the ad changed. My boss sent me over to see him."

"Ah," Slouch Hat said softly, "so you work for the Washington *Chronicle*?"

"Yes, in classified."

"That is interesting," Slouch Hat smiled. "But I'm afraid your trip has been of no avail. We are not expecting our friend back."

"Okay," I shrugged. "I did my best. I'd better be getting along, got a lot of calls to make."

"Yes, I think that is a good idea," Slouch Hat said.

I smiled at them and turned for the door. I guess I was just born without brains. I hadn't taken a step before something like a battering ram exploded against the base of my skull

and a blazing pinwheel of light danced in front of my eyes for an instant and then faded into blackness as I pitched to the floor. . . .

A cool, strong breeze in my face brought me around. When I was able to blink open my eyes I saw that I was sitting in the rear of a big smoothly purring car that was eating the ribbon of road that extended ahead of us. There was salty tinge to the breeze that whipped in from the windows and, in spite of the darkness that obscured the scenery, I could tell that we were heading toward the coast.

I looked to my left.

Slouch Hat was sitting beside me, a hand in his pocket.

I looked to my right.

The big blond ox was there, hand in pocket. He regarded me sullenly and I knew why when I saw the ugly bluish bruise on the knuckles of his exposed hand.

There was a throbbing ache at the base of my skull where the young ox had slugged me.

"Okay," I said, "what goes?"

"Shut up," Slouch Hat said. "You'll know soon enough."

There was an ominous ring in the man's voice. I shut up. About twenty minutes later the car swung off the highway and followed a crooked dirt road for several jolting miles and then, just when I was feeling like a milkshake, it slowed to a stop alongside a small dark hut.

Ahead, by the silver glow of the moon, I could see the shimmering beauty of the ocean. The driver got out and Slouch Hat followed suit. The blond ox shoved a gun into my side.

"Get out," he said softly. "And be careful."

I stumbled through the darkness toward the hut. There was a gun in my back and nothing else I could do. The

door was open and I stepped over the threshold with a clammy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

The door slammed behind me and then, an instant later, a small light was flashed on, casting a pale, uncertain illumination about the little room.

The room was small and crudely furnished and there was only one door other than the one by which I had entered. Slouch Hat was standing in the center of the room regarding me with a humorless smile; the driver was at the window peering out toward the ocean; the blond ox was directly behind me and I knew that the muzzle of his gun was but inches from my spinal column.

"Kidnapping is a pretty serious business," I said to Slouch Hat. "Especially kidnapping reporters. How do you propose to wiggle out of that?"

Slouch Hat's grin was wolfish.

"Since you are being technical," he said, "the charge against us will not be kidnapping." He paused and his smile widened. "The charge will be murder!"

The blond ox behind me grabbed my wrists, jerked them together and looped a rope about them and pulled the knots tight. There wasn't much point in struggling.

The driver at the window said quietly, "There is the signal."

"Good," Slouch Hat nodded. "We must hurry."

He stepped over and opened the room's other door and said something in a low voice. There was a movement inside the connecting room and then a small figure appeared in the doorway. A small man with a red face and black hair and pleasant intelligent features.

I recognized him instantly as Ang-Ar. He looked at me briefly, without interest, then turned to the tall dark leader.

"Are we ready?" His small hands were concealed in his pockets, and he spoke softly, without expression.

Slouch Hat nodded. My blond keeper shoved me toward the door. Outside the darkness was relieved by a quarter moon. We followed a pathway leading to the beach. Slouch Hat was in the lead; Ang-Ar was behind him, followed by the stocky figure of the driver. The blond ox and I brought up the rear.

When we reached the beach Slouch Hat produced a flashlight and signalled rapidly. His light was answered by another far out on the dark swell of the water. And I could see an ominous black shadow about two hundred yards out. A long dark shadow that was like the drifting carcass of a mighty shark. A cold hand of fear closed around my heart. Suddenly everything was clear. These men were agents of the Axis, one of their subs was lying out on the surface of the water either to pick them up or to unload more spies and saboteurs. What part Ang-Ar was playing in this game I didn't know.

Slouch Hat turned to me. His smile was gone.

"If you had been able to control your inquisitive instincts," he said, "this unpleasantness might have been avoided."

Slowly he drew a gun from his pocket.

"Unfortunately you must remain behind," he said.

Ang-Ar stepped forward quietly. His glance was puzzled as it moved over the three Axis agents."

"But, gentlemen," he said softly, "you—"

"Please keep quiet," Slouch Hat said harshly. "What I said has nothing to do with what I am going to do. Remember that I have this." He whipped out a small slender tube from his coat pocket. I recognized it as the disin-

tegrating ray weapon.

"Of course you have it," Ang-Ar said, "I gave it to you." He shook his head in a puzzled fashion. "I do not understand this. If you men are agents of the United Nations—"

"What!" I yelled. I couldn't help it. I suddenly saw the whole picture. I wheeled to Ang-Ar, breaking away from the blond guard who held me. "Don't listen to these lying rats," I shouted. "They're—"

Slouch Hat stepped forward and clubbed me with the butt of his gun along the temple. A sick, nauseous pain flooded through me as I fell helplessly to the ground; but I didn't black out. I just lay there, gasping and miserable. Through a maze of pain I saw Slouch Hat swing his gun around to cover Ang-Ar.

"Don't make a move," he snapped. "I have what I want from you and I'd be happy to blast a hole through your stomach."

"You struck a helpless man," Ang-Ar said in a soft musing tone. "That is the evidence of the brute streak, I imagine. That is the mark by which one can tell them." He sounded like a man talking to himself, thinking a problem over out loud before arriving at a definite conclusion.

"Shut up!" Slouch Hat said tensely. His gun hand was trembling with the eagerness to fire.

"How stupid I've been," Ang-Ar murmured. "I am very dissatisfied with myself."

Slouch Hat backed slightly. "You talk too much," he murmured to Ang-Ar.

I saw the gleam in his eye. "—careful," I croaked. "He's going to shoot."

"Yes," said Ang-Ar reflectively, "I imagine he is."

With a slight smile he moved one

hand slightly and instantly a blazing aura of brilliant radiation sprang about him, like a protective shield. Slouch Hat fired three times in rapid succession. Ang-Ar continued to smile. The bullets melted with an audible hiss as they struck the fiery armor of leaping light surrounding him.

The three Axis agents staggered back, but they were unable to avoid the three shafts of lance-like light that suddenly speared forth from the cone of energy and drove into their foreheads.

They fell, sprawling on the sand, without a sound. And the blazing light that surrounded Ang-Ar faded away. I felt his hands working on my bonds and then I was free and staggering dizzily to my feet.

"I have been unpleasantly duped," he said, with a rather humble smile. "I came here under the impression that I was to meet the heads of your war department. Instead these men—"

A rattle suddenly sounded over the water and spray began kicking up along the shoreline.

"The sub," I snapped. "They're opening up on us. Get down!"

"How foolish of them," Ang-Ar murmured.

The blazing cone of energy sprang about him again. He raised one arm and a brilliant, arcing beam of light flashed out over the water. There was a mighty roar in my ears and then hissing, sputtering turbulence, as if all the boilers in the world were suddenly exploding.

The light blinded me and the noise pounded in my ears until I could hear nothing. When the cataclysmic roar

subsided the blazing radiance disappeared and, a hundred yards out, I could see a great frothing series of bubbles and oil breaking the surface. The shark-like shadow of the sub was gone.

Ang-Ar stepped to the sprawled body of the man who had worn the slouch hat and took a small slender object from his limp fingers. It was the small disintegrator ray. He slipped it into his pocket.

"I shall leave you now," he said. "My coming here was a mistake. I might do more harm than good by trying to help your brave people. The difference between the development of our civilizations is too great to be spanned; but," he smiled fleetingly, "should you really need us we will be ready and waiting." The cone of electrical energy blazed again and when its glow subsided I was alone on the beach with the bodies of three Axis agents.

I turned and headed back up the path to where we had left the car. . . .

Of course I got the credit for single-handedly capturing three saboteurs who attempted to land on our coast. I felt guilty as hell accepting the plaudits of everyone from the President on down, but what could I do? If I told the truth I'd wind up in a strait jacket. So . . .

Now, on still nights, when I'm working a late beat I look up and find the red eye of Mars winking in the blackness of the bowl of night—and I feel a pleasant warm glow of reassurance.

We won't need their help to win this war. But it's comforting to know if we should, Ang-Ar and others like him are ready and willing and waiting.

ROOM FOR TREES

THE United States Forest Service reported at the close of its annual inventory taking, that deforested lands greater in area than the whole of Italy still await tree replanting. The

total tree-stripped land amounts to 77 million acres, of which only 3 million are owned by the government and 74 million are held by companies and individuals.

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Röntgen

**He was justly famous for research in the field of physics,
but the crowning achievement of his career was the X-ray.**

WILHELM KONRAD VON RÖNTGEN was born at Lennep in East Prussia on March 27, 1845. He received his early education in Holland, and then went to study at the University of Zurich, where he specialized in physics. Here he received his doctor's degree.

He then became assistant to Kundt at Würzburg and afterwards at Strasbourg, becoming *Privat-dozent* at the latter university in 1874. Next year he was appointed professor of mathematics and physics at the Agricultural Academy of Hohenheim, and in 1876 he returned to Strasbourg as extraordinary professor. In 1879 he was chosen ordinary professor of physics and director of the Physical Institute at Giessen, and in 1885 he occupied the same position at Würzburg. In 1899 he was appointed professor of experimental physics at the University of Munich, a position he held during the remainder of his active life.

It was at the University of Würzburg that he made the discovery for which his name is chiefly known, the Röntgen rays, which brought him honors from institutions of learning throughout the world. In 1895, while experimenting with a highly exhausted vacuum tube on the conduction of electricity through gases, he observed the fluorescence of a barium platinocyanide screen which happened to be lying near. Further investigation showed that this radiation had the power of passing through various substances which are opaque to ordinary light, and also of affecting a photographic plate.

Its behavior being curious in several respects, particularly in regard to reflection and refraction, doubt rose in his mind whether it was to be looked upon as light or not, and he was led to put forward the hypothesis that it was due to longitudinal vibrations in the ether, not to transverse ones like ordinary light! but in view of the uncertainty existing as to its nature he called it X-rays. The rays were so called by himself because for some time, he was unable to explain them.

To produce them, a Crooke's tube is employed. This is a sealed tubular or globular glass vessel, from which the air has been withdrawn. Into its ends or sides have been sealed metallic conducting wires, connected with a source of the electric current. The incoming or positive current wire, may

or may not be fitted with a small metal plate at its inside termination, and is called the anode. The other, by which the current leaves the tube, carries at its end a small concave metal plate, the concavity being turned towards the interior. This is called the cathode. When a current of electricity is passed through the apparatus, aside from the glowing effect produced, certain rays originate on the cathode plate which, being brought to a focus on the inside of the tube, pass through the glass. These are the Röntgen rays, and have very remarkable properties. They appear to be capable of passing through nearly all substances, but not with equal ease or speed, dense substances being less permeable than less massive ones. They also have the power of chemically acting on the sensitive photographic plate or film.

As these rays pass freely through living flesh, but less freely through the bones, or any dense metallic or other substance, it became possible to make shadow photographs of the living body, in which the bony skeleton or any other body less permeable than the flesh, appears as shadows, while the normal fleshy outline of the figure is revealed as a much fainter shadow. This discovery has proved of great value in the surgical world, particularly in cases of bone fractures or displacements, bullet wounds, and abnormal growths—tumors—in the tissues.

For this discovery, Röntgen received many honors, including the Rumford medal of the Royal Society of London, in 1896, jointly with Philip Lenard, who had already shown, as also had Hertz, that a portion of the cathode rays could pass through a thin film of a metal such as aluminium. In 1900 he was awarded the Barnard medal of Columbia University for the greatest discovery in science during the preceding five years.

Röntgen also conducted researches in various other branches of physics, including elasticity, capillarity, the ratio of the specific heat of gases, the conduction of heat in crystals, the absorption of heat-rays by different gases, piezo-electricity, the electromagnetic rotation of polarized light, etc. He received the Nobel Prize for physics in 1901, and was elevated to the nobility by the German government. He died at Munich on February 10, 1923.

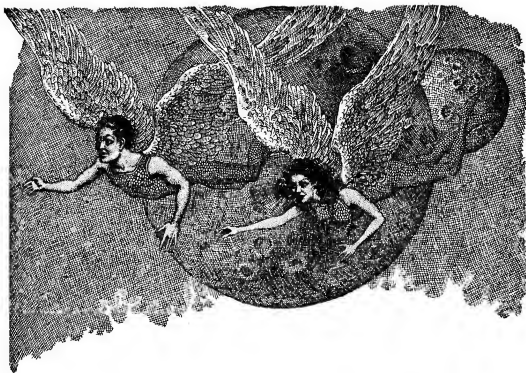
THE NEW ADAM

By STANLEY G. WEINBAUM

*Edmond Hall was born with dual minds,
and they gave him ability beyond his
Time. Yet something was lacking . . .*



Strange, fearsome shades from Beyond peopled the world of his mind



SERIAL IN TWO PARTS—PART ONE

CHAPTER I

Dawn on Olympus

ANNA HALL died as stolidly as she had lived, died unimaginatively in childbirth; and was perhaps spared some maternal pangs, for her strange son lived. Nor did grim middle-aged John Hall waste his emotional strength in either futile regrets or useless recriminations of the child. This business of living was a stern, pitiless affair; one took what befell and did not argue. He accepted the infant, and named it after his own father, old Edmond.

It must have been a rare accident of genes and determinants that produced Edmond Hall—a spindly infant, straight-legged from birth, with oddly light eyes. Yet his strangest abnormality, one that set brisk Doctor Lindquist muttering, was his hands, his tiny

slim fingers, for each of these possessed an extra joint. He clenched his three-knuckled thumb against his four-knuckled fingers into a curious little fist, and stared tearlessly with yellowish gray gaze.

"She would not have a hospital," Doctor Lindquist was muttering. "This is what comes of home births." One doubted that he meant only Anna's demise; his eyes were on her son.

John Hall said nothing; there was little, indeed, that he could say. Without cavil and in grim acceptance of little Edmond, he did what was to be done; he arranged for a nurse to care for the child, and returned somberly to his law practice. John was a good lawyer, industrious, methodical, earnest, and successful.

After a while he took to addressing the child. It was as quiet and possibly as understanding as Anna. Queer little brat! Tearless, almost voiceless, with

eyes beginning to show peculiarly amber. It gurgled occasionally; he never heard it cry. So he talked to it by evenings, sending the nurse away glad enough for the moments of liberty. She was puzzled by the little whelp; abnormal hands, abnormal mind, she thought; probably imbecilic. Nevertheless, she was kind enough, in a competent, professional manner. The child began to recognize her presence; she was his refuge and source of comfort. Perhaps this thin, dark, nervous maternal substitute influenced the infant more than he was ever to realize.

John was startled when the child's eyes began to focus. He swung his watch before it; the pale eyes followed the movement with an intensity of gaze more kitten-like than human. A wide, unwinking stare. Sometimes they looked straight into John's own eyes; the little being's gaze was so curiously intent that he was a trifle startled.

TIME passed quietly, uneventfully.

Now little Edmond was observing his immediate world with a half purposeful expression; now he was grasping at objects with his odd hands. They were agile little hands, unusually apt at seizing what was within their reach. The fingers closed like small tentacles about John's swinging watch, and tugged it, strangely and precociously, not toward the thin-lipped mouth, but before the eyes for examination.

And time dragged on. John gave up his office in the Loop, moving it to his home on Kenmore. He installed a desk in the living room, and a wall telephone; just as good as being downtown, he thought, and it saved the street car ride. He had the house wired for electric light; everybody was abandoning the hot gas-burners. His practice was well-established, and clients quickly learned

of his new business quarters. And at this time a new company was being formed to manufacture gasoline automobiles; he bought a few shares as a speculation, believing the devices due for a wave of popularity. And the "L" nosed northward block by block. This was Chicago of the first decade, sprawling in its mud and glitter. No seer nor sorcerer whispered that the young city had spawned an egg whose maturity was as yet inconceivable.

The child Edmond was speaking a few words now. "Light," he said, when the yellow carbon-filament flashed on. He toddled around the office, learned the sound of the telephone bell. His nurse dressed him in little shirted suits that went unharmoniously with his pinched and precocious features; he looked like a waxen elf or a changeling. Yet, from a parental standpoint he was a model child; mischief seemed absent from his make-up. He was strangely content to be alone, and happily played meaningless games with himself. John still talked to him at evening. He listened owlishly solemn, and seldom questioned, and seasons came and vanished.

Nothing ever disturbed his poise. John's equally grim and never friendly brother Edward (also named for that old father of both) came once or twice to call in the early years.

"The brat's lonesome," he stated baldly. "You'll bring him up queer unless you get him some friends."

The four-year-old Edmond answered for himself in a piping voice: "I'm not lonesome."

"Eh? Who do you play with?"

"I play with myself. I talk with myself. I don't need any friend."

His uncle laughed. "Queer, John, like I told you."

Queer or not, the imp developed. At six he was a silent slender child with curious amber eyes and nondescript

brown hair, and a habit of spending many hours alone at the window. He betrayed none of the father-worship common to sons, but he liked the slowly aging John, and they got along well together in a distant way. His curious hands had long ago ceased to bother his father; they were at least as useful as normal members, and at times unusually apt and delicate. The child built things—tall houses of cards that John's steadiness could not duplicate, intricate bits of machinery from a mechanical building toy, and sometimes neat little sailing planes of paper, matches, and glue.

At this age Edmond's quiet way of living was rather ruthlessly upset. John chose to enter him in school.

CHAPTER II

Morning on Olympus

THERE was a public school at the time not more than a block and a half from the house on Kenmore. John placed young Edmond there, disregarding the Kindergarten and starting him in first grade. The nurse, more or less of an ornament the last two years, dropped out of the boy's sphere. His father took him the short distance to school for a week or so, and thereafter he trudged it himself, as he had often watched others from his window.

For the first time in his short life his world impinged on that of others. He was thrust willy-nilly out of his privacy into the semi-public ordeal of grade school. His first day was something of a trial; he was stared at, and stared back, and stood for the most part quietly waiting for instructions. A few young sophisticates who had come up from Kindergarten grouped together, calling each other by name, and definitely dividing themselves from the

others. However, there were many newcomers like Edmond who stood at a loss; some of them cried, and some waited aimlessly for the assignment of seats.

And that stage passed. The strange child refused association with others; he came and left alone, and spent his recesses wandering by himself about the school-yard. He did not seem unusually bright. The goad of competition simply slipped off his hide; he flatly and definitely refused to compete. Questions put by the teacher were answered with unvarying correctness, but he never volunteered. On the other hand, his memory was faultless, and his grasp of explanations rather remarkable. And so the strange child moved in a world as frictionless as he could contrive and the grades slipped by with the lengthy seasons of childhood. He seemed to learn with acceptable facility. He was never late, seldom early, and still pursued as solitary a course as conditions permitted.

In fourth grade he encountered a physical training instructress who had taken a summer course in the psychology of morbid children. She singled Edmond out; here, she thought, is both a good specimen and an opportunity to help. Introverted, repressed, feeling of inferiority—these were the tags she applied to him.

She arranged games during the gymnasium hour, and attempted to arouse Edmond to compete. She paired him with one or another of the children in races, jumping contests, competitions of various sorts. She appointed him to drop the handkerchief when that game was in progress, and in various ways tried to direct him in paths she thought proper from her three-months study of the subject.

Edmond realized the situation with some disfavor. He promptly and coolly

obtained an excuse from physical training, displaying his curious hands as a reason. In some ways he paid for his privilege; the excuse drew the attention of his classmates to his manual deformity. They commented on it in the blunt manner of ten-year-olds, and were continually asking to see the questionable fingers. Edmond obligingly wriggled them for their amusement; he saw in this the easiest attainment of the privacy he desired. And after a while interest did fade; he was permitted again to come and go alone.

HE WAS not, of course, spared entirely in the fierce savagery of childhood. Often enough he was the butt of gibes, the recipient of challenges to fight, or the bearer of a derisive, though usually short-lived, sobriquet. He faced all of these ordeals with a stony indifference. He came and went as he had always done—alone. If he held any resentment, he never showed it, with but possibly one exception.

He was in the sixth grade, and just twelve years old. In every grade, as he had noticed, there had been one leader, one boy who assumed mastery, and whom the others obeyed with a sort of loose discipline. For two years this leader had been Paul—Paul Varney, son of an English professor at nearby Northwestern University, a fine blond youngster, clean-featured, large for his age, intelligent, and imaginative. Very grown up was Paul; he dated with little Evanne Marten in the fifth grade in Platonic imitation of his elders. It was his custom and his privilege to walk home each afternoon with Vanny, who had the blackest hair in school. And it was Paul who coined the sobriquet "Snake-fingers," which pursued Edmond most of a week. At the beginning the name gave Edmond a day of torment—not that he minded the epi-

thet, but he hated with a fierce intensity the attention it centered on him. He stalked icily out of the door that afternoon. The nickname followed him, taken up by others in the cruel hunting-pack of children. A group trailed him, headed by Paul.

At the sidewalk he encountered little black-haired Vanny of the fifth; she took in the situation instantly, and seized his arm.

"Walk with me, Edmond."

There was a cessation of sound from behind him; this situation was up to Paul. And Paul strode up to Edmond; he was a head taller than his slight opponent.

"Vanny's walking with me!" he said.

"I'll walk with whom I please, Paul Varney!" Vanny cut in.

"This guy won't be able to walk in a minute!" He advanced toward Edmond.

"All right," said the latter coldly, with a curious intense light in his amber eyes. He doubled the troublesome fingers into curious fists.

"Sure, you're bigger'n Edmond. Bully!" Vanny taunted Paul. He stopped; whether Vanny's gibe or Edmond's defiance had halted him was not evident.

"Can't fight with girls around," was his comment, as he swung on his heel. The pack, leaderless, watched the quarry depart.

"Why do they call you Evanne?" asked Edmond as they walked on.

"One grandma's name was Eva and the other's name was Anne," sang Vanny. She had answered the same question numerous times. Her mind reverted to the scene of a moment before. "Why don't you get mad at Paul once in a while? He rides you too much."

"Perhaps," said Edmond. "Sometimes." He fell silent, and they walked on until they reached Vanny's home.

"Goodbye, Edmond." She took the books he had carried for her and skipped into the house.

IN THE morning the quarrel had been forgotten; at least, Paul did not refer to it, and Edmond saw no reason to revive it. Paul walked home with Vanny as usual that afternoon, and every afternoon following. Edmond was satisfied, he sought no further meeting with the girl, but he felt a slight thrill of pleasure to have her smile and greet him thereafter when they met in the hall or on the playground. He always smiled a thin, youthfully sardonic smile in answer. It was the friendliest grimace he could manage with what features he had available.

The years in the grades dragged on—futile, stupid years, the boy thought. For, though no one had realized it, Edmond never studied. True, he handed in the usual themes and exercises when these were required, and he purchased the usual text books, but these were never perused. The explanations of the teacher, the little drill he had in class, were all he required; his almost infallible memory served him sufficiently to render needless any further study.

In these awakening years he was beginning to appreciate something else—that there was a difference between the beings about him and himself. Not the minor physical differences that he had always known, but a mental and emotional gap that he was unable to bridge. This realization was slow in dawning. He began by recognizing a slightly superior feeling, a mild contempt, for his classmates; they were stupid, slow, plodding; they worked over problems that yielded instantly to his perceptions. Even Paul, who was incessantly being called on for answers when others failed, and who always made the highest marks, seemed merely a less com-

plete dullard than the rest.

But the vital difference was of another sort, a variation not of degree but of nature. This conclusion came to him as the culmination of many semesters of reprimands by his various teachers, and the accumulated repetitions of an adage that seemed meaningless to him. He was in seventh grade when the realization dawned, and it came about in this fashion.

The geography period was in session, and the teacher was expounding at some length the growing importance of South America to the United States. Edmond, who was seated near a window, was staring disinterestedly out at the street. He noticed a commotion at the corner—two automobiles had mutually dented fenders—and turned his head, focusing his eyes on the scene. His motion drew the teacher's petulant glance.

"Edmond Hall!" was her impatient exclamation. "Please forget the window and pay attention!" This she followed with the most surprising statement he had heard during his seven school years. "No one can think of two things at once!"

Edmond knew she was wrong. He *had* been following her. For he himself could with perfect clarity pursue two separate and distinct trains of thought at the same time.

CHAPTER III

Introspection

HIGH school. A larger world wherein it was far easier to walk alone. Classes under various teachers and with various associates, and freedom from the prying glare of prolonged intimacy. Edmond was half content.

He was now a slender quiet lad of fourteen, of about average height. His

features were beginning to betray a youthful ascetic saturninity and his rare smiles seemed almost sneers, foreshadowing a sort of demoniac beauty to come. Boys disliked him, and girls ignored him; he made no advances to either and quietly repulsed casual attempts at companionship.

The work itself weighed very lightly upon him; he had not lost his miraculous facility nor infallible memory. His two study periods sufficed to complete any form-work his courses required, and he disregarded the rest. He had, therefore, ample leisure for a rigid regime of introspection he was following. For more than a year the youth had been examining his own mind.

The realization of his difference had become a certainty; evidence abounded in his reading, in his associates, in the very manner of the school's teaching. He had two minds, equal and independent, capable each in itself of pursuing a train of thought. He could read with half his being and dream idly with his other self; or on occasion, he could fuse his twin mentalities, focus both on the same point as a single unit, and reason with a lucidity and insight that might have amazed his instructors. He could read with astonishing facility, garnering the contents of half a page of print in an instant's glance, or he could deal with the simple quadratics of high school algebra without the need of chalk or pencil. Yet he never flaunted these abilities; he pursued his accustomed path, never volunteering, never correcting, watching the blond Paul perform proudly, and holding silently a secret contempt.

In his second year, little Vanny arrived, with her growing black braids of hair; Paul walked with her in the halls in a manner mature as befits a sophomore in high school, and she still smiled at Edmond when they met. He noted

a shade of distraction in her face, and recalled that her father had died during the summer.

In the house on Kenmore, the senescent John smoked on in his library. His little block of motor shares had multiplied itself into a respectable nestegg; he had given up his practice for a quiet existence in the shade. He refused to own an automobile, berated the rumbling of the distant "L," and read the conservative *Daily News*.

Edmond and his father got along well enough. Old John was satisfied with his son's quiet reserve and asocial bent; it seemed to him a sign of industry and serious mind. And Edmond was content to have his leisure undisturbed; the two spent their evenings reading, and seldom spoke. Berkeley and Hume were back on the shelves, and John was plodding through the great *Critique*, and Edmond, finding novels of little interest, was perusing page by page the volumes of the *Britannica*. He absorbed information with a sponge-like memory that retained everything, but as yet the influx was unclassified and random, for the practical and theoretical had no differences in his small experience. Thus the older man absorbed a flood of philosophy with no retaining walls of knowledge, and the younger accumulated loose bricks of knowledge that enclosed no philosophy.

THE years rolled on tail-to-trunk like an elephant's parade. Edmond entered Northwestern University, and here found a privacy almost as profound as that of his early youth. A war had been fought and finished without disturbing the curious household other than the mild vicissitudes of meatless days, Hooverizing, and Liberty Bonds. The stormy aftermath was over the world, and the decade of Youth was in its inception.

Edmond chose a medical course, and settled into a routine of home-to-class. The campus was just beyond the city limits, and he made the trip by street-car since old John still held steadfastly to his refusal of motor cars. His first year's sojourn in the College of Medicine was but a repetition of high school. Paul was there, majoring in English; occasionally they passed on the campus with casual nods, and Edmond had his father Professor Varney in an English lecture course. He was not greatly interested in any of his freshman studies; they were simply requirements to be put by since his pre-medic course permitted little latitude for choice. However, he mastered French with considerable facility.

In his second year, he derived some enjoyment from an elective course in Physics under Professor Albert Stein. This brilliant little Jewish savant was already famous; his measurements of electrons were beginning to open up vistas looking to the unknown. Behind his near-sighted eyes and slightly accented speech, Edmond perceived a mind alert and intuitive, an intellect that thought in lesser degree almost as he did himself.

And that year Vanny appeared again, and that was also the year that old John died. Edmond was twenty, a slender young man with strange amber eyes. His grim Uncle Edward became his guardian for the year remaining until his majority, and managed the not-too-extensive estate with a grumbling astuteness. Edmond lived on at the house on Kenmore, and Magda, grown plump and ruddy, ran the house as she had done for twenty years.

So Edmond drifted on, a slim saturnine figure, toying with knowledge in those incredible minds he possessed. He read voluminously in every field save fiction. Learning came to him with a

consummate ease. He moved through the University like a lonely, flaming-eyed spirit, coming and going in solitude and scarcely ever addressed outside the classroom. Only Evanne Marten, grown very lovely with her glistening black mop of hair, tossed him an occasional word of greeting.

THEN he was twenty-one, and assumed the management of his resources. His income was sufficient for comfort; he made few changes in old John's investments. However, he purchased a long grey roadster of rather expensive make; there was something about mechanical excellence that pleased his curious character. He drove the machine with almost miraculous dexterity, slipping through traffic like wind through grain. His slim, tentacular fingers seemed especially designed for the management of machinery, and the thrill of driving was as intense as if he used his own muscles. Sometimes he drove to the open country, selecting unpatrolled dirt roads, and here drove at breath-taking speed, pitting his skill against the vagaries of the terrain.

His courses neared completion. Toward the end, the queer Edmond was somewhat less content; a sense of futility oppressed him, and he perceived no outlet anywhere for his energies. The curious being was lonely.

"I am enclosed in a viscid mist," he reflected. "Knowledge is a barren thing, since I see no closer to its end than the dulllest of these about me." And his other mind replied, "This conclusion is unwarranted since hitherto I have made no attempt to attain happiness, but have let my fortunes drift without plan to the beckonings of chance."

Thereafter he formed a plan. His degree was granted and he departed,

making no effort to serve as an interne, since he did not wish to practice. An experiment awaited him that he relished; if happiness could be reduced to formula, he meant so to reduce it, solving at least for himself the elusive mystery.

Yet an unusual sense of sadness pursued him; he endured the graduation exercises in a sombre silence. After the return to his home, he put away his car, and wandered aimlessly westward, past the decrepit school of his early youth, past the house that had been Vanny's home, past the high school now empty for the summer's recess. The half-deserted summer streets seemed sterile and melancholy; he was lonely.

Before him spread the glass fronts of a business street. A group of half a dozen persons clustered before the window of one—a pet shop. A glance revealed the attraction—the gambols and grimaces of a small monkey. Edmond paused for a moment; an impulse stirred him. He entered the shop, emerging in a moment bearing a paper-wrapped cage. The group filtered away as the attraction vanished.

"Here is my companion," thought Edmond, "and my defense against loneliness. At least he will be as understanding as any among these who watched him."

He bore the chattering little animal to the house on Kenmore.

"Your name," he said, "shall be Homo, after the being who apes you less successfully than you him." He smiled as the creature chattered in reply. "My friend," he continued, "your sympathy and intelligence shall aid me in my appointed task."

The monkey Homo chattered and grimaced, and rattled the bars of his flimsy cage; Edmond slipped the catch, and the little being pushed open the

door, bounding with tree-born agility to Edmond's knee. There he sat in patent enjoyment of his liberty, while his strange master watched him with an expression almost of amusement, finding in his antics a momentary release from his own sombre nature. The youth toyed with his unusual emotion of pleasure, reflecting, "This creature, unthinking and happy, may direct my quest, who am thinking and therefore unhappy; let me see whether I can complete the circle, and in the pursuit of knowledge find happiness." Thus Edmond entered upon his search.

CHAPTER IV

Traffic with Nature

DURING this epoch of his life, Edmond was not unhappy, at least until the period was approaching its end. He threw himself into a round of labors and speculations; he spent many hours in the unraveling of mysteries by processes purely rational. For a span of several months he found no need for the mechanics of experiment since the tabulations of others' results were available for his use. He absorbed the facts and rejected the speculations of science. This rejection was due in part to his distrust of the theories of these half-minded creatures about him; he was inclined to doubt the truth of any hypothesis promulgated by such beings.

He set about his own researches, therefore, working with an enthusiasm that almost deluded himself. He realized, indeed, that his purpose in these researches was artificial and sterile; he had no consuming love of knowledge, and no deep inherent desire to serve humanity; what drove him like a seven-tongued scourge was the specter of boredom standing just behind him. To

a being of Edmond's nature this was sufficient incentive.

His income was ample for his immediate needs. He subsided, therefore, into a quiet regime of speculation, building for himself an esoteric picture of the universe to assist his purposes. In this field as well he found little meat in the hypotheses of his predecessors; excepting, and with qualification, Einstein.

"The Bohr atom, the Schrödinger atom," he reflected, "are two meaningless attempts to describe that which is forever indescribable and are worthless for my purposes. The very nature of matter is a problem not entirely physical, but partly metaphysical, and as such defies any absolute resolvence, at least by human kind with its single viewpoint.

"From my standpoint, the universe consists, not of concepts or sensations, like Berkeley's, not of matter and energy, like the scientists of the first decade, not even of mathematical quantities, like James Jeans, but purely and entirely of Laws, or perhaps *a Law*. This chair on which I lean is an aspect of a law; my breath, this very thought, are other phases."

His companion self, following an allied course, continued, "Einstein's little booklet, assuming of course its correctness, represents my universe, yet even this conception lacks something! One does not eat a law, live in, carve, sleep, nor reproduce with an equation. Behind these laws stands Authority; had I the necessary Authority, these dozen scraps of equation-scribbled paper would be in very truth the universe. This demiurgy is beyond even my potentiality."

His minds merged; the two thought courses were one.

"It would not astonish me to find the Authority behind all Law to be only my

old acquaintance Chance. Perhaps the supreme wisdom lies in the law of averages."

Suddenly Edmond abandoned these futile speculations, perceiving that they pointed nowhere. He determined to dally for a while with experiment, and to this end moved what equipment he possessed into the room he had occupied during his school-days. This was at the rear of the house; as a further precaution, he had the windows leaded lest certain effects of flame and spark arouse the neighbors.

FOR a while he intrigued himself with the study of the nature of Life. For many months a procession of rabbits and guinea pigs came in through the kitchen in wire cages and left via the incinerator in ash-wagons. The problem proved elusive; neither the mechanists nor the vitalists held the answer. Nowhere in any of the little creatures could Edmond find any trace of a vital fluid or an essence of life, yet he saw more and more clearly that these beings he slaughtered were somewhat more than machines.

"Perhaps," he thought, "the vital fluid is more subtle than matter or energy for which my traps are set. Perhaps it partakes of both natures, or neither; yet I will not concede the existence of quantities called spiritual.

"The difference between living beings and machines," continued his companion self, "is in this: that life contains a sort of ghostly purpose, an imitation of a purpose that drives its subjects to prolong their own misery, to force others to live after them. This semblance of a purpose is the mysterious vital fluid which is of the nature neither of matter nor of energy."

During the progress of his experiments, he became interested for a time in the matter of intellect. He was curi-

ous to observe the relationship between intelligence and the brain, and to this end devised a means of stimulating the growth of a rabbit's cerebrum, by using certain pituitary extracts. He watched the miserable little monstrosity in its cage suspended on the wall, as its head grew out of all proportion, until it was forced to crawl pushing the unwieldy capital along before it. The thing grew slowly. After several months Edmond perceived or imagined that it watched him with a trace of interest; certainly it grew to recognize his feeding, and this was a recognition never granted by its companions. The abnormal creature kept its miserable black eyes incessantly on him. It cowered away in terror when he approached the cage with his syringe for the daily injections.

"Perhaps I can do as much for you," he told Homo, who chattered on his shoulder, "though I suspect the inflicting of intelligence is the greatest injury Fate can do to any being, for it is literally to thrust that being into Hell. You are doubtless fairly happy, Homo, and better off as you are."

As the experiment progressed, Edmond began to perceive the development of certain unpleasanties, and frowned often in his observation of the little monster. He was neither surprised nor very displeased, therefore, to enter the laboratory one day and discover that the rabbit had somehow contrived to spring the latch to its cage and fling itself to the floor. It lay with its delicate, misshapen skull shattered, and the abnormal brain crushed.

"Very likely it is better this way," thought Edmond. "The thing was miserably unhappy and I believe, more than a little mad."

A GAIN he abandoned his line of investigation, turning now back to the realm of physics. He noted that

metallic lead exposed to the weather for long periods became slightly radioactive. With this as a clue he produced lead with an activity nearly one fourth as high as radium, but was unable to proceed beyond that point. He wanted to solve now the mystery of atomic energy to see the effects of that colossal power to which all other sources were as rain drops to the ocean. He wanted to release this power and to control it, if control were possible. He set about to devise a method.

"A violinist can shatter a wine-glass if he plays the correct note," he thought, "or a few soldiers trample down the greatest bridge in the world if they time their steps rightly. I can doubtless shatter an atom if I use a properly sympathetic vibration. Where now am I to find a vibratory beam of the inconceivable frequency I require? Cosmic rays have it, but they dribble out of space in beams too uselessly tenuous. I must produce my own."

He turned his thoughts to a method of generating his beam. He considered the use of the bursting atoms of niton as his oscillators.

"Since the cosmic rays of space are generated by the birth-throes of atoms," he reflected, "I can certainly pervert them to be the agents of atomic death." But niton, the deadly mysterious emanation of dying radium, was beyond his means. He needed perhaps ten grams of radium for its production, a quantity whose cost exceeded his financial powers. First, therefore, he found it necessary to procure enough money to purchase it.

This problem presented at first no outstanding difficulties to such a being as Edmond. He saw many methods. However, certain requirements had to be met. He wanted a continuous source of income that would require none of his time to produce; a royalty on a patent

would provide that. But whatever device he patented must be proof against imitation or theft, and be readily marketable. It should moreover be foolproof to the extent of revealing no secrets which he considered dangerous to a society that rested on the rocks of the cave.

He turned his twin minds to his activated lead. He produce a little rod of this material, perhaps the general size of a safety match. Removing a vacuum tube from his radio, he broke the glass bulb from the base and affixed his lead rod there to, slipping it carefully through the tubular grid so that it replaced the delicate tungsten filament. With the more than human dexterity of his fingers he replaced and evacuated the bulb, leaving the tips that carried the filament current disconnected.

"Here is a cold, unvarying and permanent source of electron flow," he reflected. "Presumably I can interest a manufacturer in a vacuum tube which is completely quiet, practically eternal, and that consumes no A-current. Then there is the considerable advantage of simplified circuits."

He did not trouble himself to try the device, but placed a diagram and description in the hands of a patent attorney, and sent his model to the office of Stoddard & Co., one of the larger independent makers of vacuum tubes, with a letter describing it. Thereafter he ceased to think of it, and turned his activities again to the problem of energy and matter. He prepared his apparatus, and waited for his fortunes to provide the funds he required.

CHAPTER V

Commerce

PERHAPS a fortnight after the forwarding of Edmond's tube, he re-

ceived a reply from the concern.

"We have received and tested a vacuum tube submitted by you . . .

"The device fulfills your claims to some extent, and there is a possibility that we might be interested in its manufacture. . . . Should you care to discuss the matter, we will be pleased to receive you at this office at . . ."

Edmond smiled his ironic smile, and dropped the letter in his pocket.

"One of the axioms of a buyer is to appear only casually interested," he thought. "Let their dignities be satisfied; I'll go to them."

Some three hours after the time designated, Edmond presented himself at the outer office of Stoddard & Co., and passed a card to the startled office girl. There ensued a delay of several minutes. Edmond guessed that the powers behind the door summoned an additional member. Then he was ushered in.

Four men rose as he entered, staring at him. He felt the instant dislike that was his common reception; it flooded the office with a tenseness, a chilly, unpleasant strain. He stared back unsmiling, and after a moment, the oldest of the group flushed and coughed apologetically.

"Mr. Hall?" he said. "I am Mr. Stoddard and this is Mr. Thwaites, our secretary. These two gentlemen," indicating a square-jawed, blue-eyed individual of forty, and a somewhat younger one with spectacles, "are Bohn and Hoffman, our engineers."

Edmond bowed slightly; the men nodded. Not one of the group had extended a hand. He seated himself.

The president interrupted another strained silence with a cough.

"We had expected you earlier," he said.

"It was inconvenient," said Edmond, and waited.

"Well, well, perhaps we had better get down to business. This vacuum tube of yours is—somewhat revolutionary. It seems to function satisfactorily, but you understand that in the event of our adopting it, it would mean the discarding and altering of considerable machinery."

Edmond nodded.

"You must realize that this entails great expense, and there is some doubt in my mind as to the value of the device."

"Well?" said Edmond.

"What terms would you consider, if we should decide to acquire the rights to your tube?"

"I will require," said Edmond, "a five percent royalty on the selling price of the tube, and will permit you to manufacture the device under an exclusive contract with me. I will retain ownership of the patent, and the right to terminate the contract should your production fall below a minimum of two thousand per day. I will further require an initial payment of a nominal amount—ten thousand dollars will be satisfactory, and you may if you wish check this against future royalties. Finally, I will myself draw the contract."

"Those terms are impossible!" exclaimed the president.

"Very well," said Edmond, and waited.

"Are you a lawyer?" asked Mr. Thwaites.

"No," said Edmond, "nevertheless the contract will be binding." He stared silently at the group before him, his incredible hands clasped over the handle of his cane. There was an aura of tension about the group. Each member felt an inexplicable aversion to this curious presence, and Edmond knew it. He smiled his saturnine and supremely irritating smile.

THE president looked at him with a weary somberness.

"Will you listen to our offer?"

"I consider my terms equitable," said Edmond. "May I point out what you doubtless realize—that you have no choice? The concern to which I grant this tube will immediately possess a monopoly, since all other types are instantly obsolete. You are compelled to accept my proposal."

The four stared silently back at him. Bohn opened his square jaw and inserted a pipe. He lit it, and puffed a moment.

"May I ask some questions?" he snapped.

"Yes."

"What's the source of your electron flow?"

"It is a disintegration product. The energy used is atomic."

"What's the material you use in your filament?"

"Radio-active lead."

"There's no lead that active."

"No," said Edmond, "I created it."

"How?"

"That," said Edmond, "I will not answer."

"Why not?" Bohn's voice crackled with enmity.

"Because the explanation is beyond your understanding."

The engineer gave a contemptuous snort at the insult, and fell silent, eyeing Edmond coldly. Edmond turned to Hoffman, who seemed on the point of speech, by the blinking of his eyes behind their lenses.

"May I ask what is the life of your filament?" he queried mildly.

"It has a half-period of about eight thousand years."

"What?"

"I say that it will dissipate half of its activity in eight thousand years."

"D'you mean the thing's eternal?"

Edmond gave again his irritating smile with its intolerable undertone of superiority and contempt.

"You asked me the life of the filament. The useful life of the tube is very much shorter. Inasmuch as the emission is constant whether or not the device is in use, certain radiations other than the electronic, produce effects. There is a tendency for the plate and grid to become active under the influence of alpha and gamma rays; this sets up a secondary opposing electron stream from them which will gradually weaken the conductive effect of the primary flow from the filament. The loss of efficiency will become noticeable in about seven years."

"But man, even that's too long!" exclaimed the president. "It practically destroys the replacement market!"

"That need not worry a concern the size of yours. It will take many decades to saturate the market."

MR. THWAITES spoke for the second time. "We are simply inviting legal trouble. The Corporation will never permit an independent to ruin its market without a fight."

"I will trust you to carry through the courts," said Edmond. "You will win, for the principle and the process of manufacture are both basic and new." He paused a moment, surveying the group. "Should it appear necessary, you may call upon me." His intonation implied contempt; the intolerable scathing smile returned to his lips. It amused him that none of the four had questioned his ability to oppose the rich and powerful Corporation, owner of most of the basic electrical patents. He noted Bohn's irritation and a certain tenseness in his jaw as he bit his pipe. "Your confidence is a high compliment, gentlemen. Is there anything further?"

"Yes!" snapped Bohn. "I think this thing is a hoax!" He rose excitedly from his chair. "This man has bought or stolen some radium from a hospital or laboratory, and he's alloyed it with lead to make his filament! He's selling you about fifteen hundred dollars' worth of radium for the cash payment of ten thousand dollars. Pay him and he'll never show up again!"

The four were on their feet facing Edmond, who still sat smiling.

"Bohn's right!" said Hoffman. "Radio-active lead—there isn't any such thing! It's a fraud!"

Thwaites opened his mouth, and then remained silent. The four angry men stood staring vindictively at the curious being who faced them still with his smile of cold contempt. There was a moment of pause bitter with hatred.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Bohn," said Edmond, his voice and expression unaltered. "Your deductions are admirable, but have the one flaw of being incorrect." He drew from his pocket a little disc as large as a silver dollar, wrapped in a dull-glinting lead-foil; he tossed this before the group, where it dropped on the table with a leaden thump.

"There is a two-ounce disc of A-lead. If it contains radium, its value will be considerably greater than your ten thousand dollar payment. I leave it as a token of good faith, gentlemen; it cost me perhaps three dollars."

He glanced at Bohn, who was unwrapping the foil about the piece with fury in his blue eyes.

"You may perform any tests you wish on this material, Mr. Bohn, but handle it gingerly. It burns—like radium!"

Edmond rose.

"I do not require your check at once, but will expect it within a week, at which time I will submit my contract

for your signatures. During the interim, Mr. Bohn and Mr. Hoffman may call at my home," he indicated his card, which still lay on the table, "for instructions in the method and some of the principles underlying the preparation of activated lead. They will perceive that the cost of manufacture is surprisingly low."

"Why only *some* of the principles?" asked Bohn, glowering.

"Those that you can comprehend," said Edmond, turning to the door. "Good afternoon, gentlemen."

He departed, hearing with amusement the crescendo of excited and angry voices issuing from the closing door. The voice of the president—"What was that man? Did you see his hands?"

CHAPTER VI

Market

EDMOND stepped out of the building into the late afternoon sun that flashed at him from the windshields of ten thousand westbound vehicles. He shaded his eyes for a moment, then crossed Adams Street and continued south, merging for the moment into the stream of living beings that eddied around and between the canyon-forming buildings.

He entered the lobby of a great white sky-scraper. Disregarding the clicking of the elevator starters, he mounted the stairs to the second floor, turning into the customer's room of his brokers. The market was long since closed; he was alone in a room of vacant chairs save for several clerks casting up the final quotations, and an old man sweeping scraps and cigarette butts into a central pile. The translux was dark, but a ticker still clicked out its story of "bid-and-asked"; no one watched it as its yellow ribbon flowed endlessly

into a waste-basket.

Edmond walked over to the far end of the room, where a smaller board carried the Curb quotations. A casual glance was sufficient; Stoddard & Co. had closed just below twenty, for a fractional loss from the preceding day. He stood for a few moments recapitulating his readily available resources—he found no need ever for written accounts—and walked over to the desk, to a clerk who had handled his occasional previous transactions. He nodded as the man greeted him by name.

"You may buy me five thousand Stoddard at twenty," he said.

"Five thousand, Mr. Hall? Do you think it advisable to speculate for that amount? Stoddard's only an independent, you know."

"I am not speculating," said Edmond.

"But the company has never paid a dividend."

"I require the stock for a particular reason."

The clerk scribbled on a blank order: "5000 Sdd. @ 20 O.B., N. Y. Curb," and passed it to him. He signed in his accustomed precise script.

"You realize, of course, that we cannot margin this stock, being on the Curb, and poor bank collateral."

"Of course," said Edmond. "I will provide sufficient security." So he departed.

BOHN and Hoffman presented themselves at Edmond's home promptly in accordance with their appointment. Magda admitted them, and directed them to the upper rear room that served as his laboratory. They found him seated facing the door, idle, and toying with little Homo who chattered furiously at them. Edmond returned their cold greetings without rising, indicating

two wooden chairs beside the long table.

Hoffman sat down quietly and faced Edmond, but his companion's eyes ranged sharply about the room. Bohn noted the blackened windows, and a peculiar shade in the illumination of the room struck him. He glanced at the lights—two bulbs of high capacity of the type called daylight; under whose blue-white glare the group assumed a corpselike grayness. Their host was hideous, Bohn thought; curious thing, he continued mentally, since his features were not irregular. The repulsion was something behind appearances, some fundamental difference in nature. He continued his inspection, considering now the equipment of the laboratory. A small motor-generator in the far corner, probably as a direct-current source, beside it a transformer, and next to that the condenser and hollow cylinder of a rather large high-frequency coil. A flat bowl of mercury rested on a little turn-table at his elbow; he gave it a twist, and it spun silently, the liquid metal rising about the sides of the bowl in a perfect parabolic mirror. Struck by a sudden thought, he glanced at the ceiling; there was a shutter there that might open on a skylight. For the rest, jars of liquid, some apparently containing algae, a sickly plant or two on a shelf below the black window, and two white rabbits dolefully munching greens in a cage on the windowless wall. Simple enough equipment!

Edmond meanwhile had dismissed the monkey, who backed away from the group, regarded the strangers with bright intelligent eyes and scampered out into the hallway.

"You are not impressed, Mr. Bohn."

"Hardly." Bohn bitterly resented the implied sneer.

"The tools are less important than the hand that wields them."

"Let's get down to business," said Bohn.

"Very well," said their host. "Will you be so kind as to lift that reflector to the table?"

He indicated one of several wooden bowls perhaps eighteen inches across whose inner surfaces seemed blackened as if charred or rubbed with graphite. Bohn stooped to lift it; it was surprisingly heavy, necessitating the use of both his hands. He placed it on the table before Edmond.

"Thank you. Now if you will watch me. . . ."

He opened a drawer in the table, removing from it a spool of heavy wire and a whitened cardboard square perhaps four inches to a side.

"This is lead wire. This cardboard is coated with calcium fluoride."

HE PASSED the articles to Bohn, who received them with patient skepticism.

"I want you to see that the wire is inactive. I will extinguish the lights"—the room was suddenly and mysteriously dark—"and you will note that the board does not fluoresce."

Bohn rubbed the wire across the square, but there was no result whatsoever. The lights were suddenly glowing again; the wire and square were unchanged save for a scratch or two on the latter's white surface.

"Your demonstration is convincing," said Bohn sardonically. "We feel assured that the wire is innocent and harmless."

"Pass it here, then, and I will give it its fangs."

Edmond unwound some six inches from the spool, leaving it still attached, extended out like a little wand. He drew three cords from points on the edge of his reflector; at the apex of the tetrahedron thus formed he gathered

the ends. To mark this elusive point in space he moved a ring stand beside the bowl setting a clamp to designate the intersection of his bits of string which he allowed to drop.

"A simple method of locating the focus," he explained. "As the black surface of my reflector does not reflect light, I have to use other means. The focal length, as you see, is about thirty centimeters. The reflector itself is not parabolic, but spherical. I do not desire too sharp a focus, as I wish to irradiate the entire volume of the lead wire—not merely a single point."

The two visitors watched without comment. Their host passed the six-inch rod of lead back and forth through the point indicated by the clamp, back and forth perhaps a dozen times. Then he tossed the spool to Bohn.

"Hold it by the spool, Mr. Bohn. It will bite now."

Bohn examined the little rod, which seemed utterly unchanged.

"Well?" he said sharply.

"We will try the fluorescent screen. I will extinguish the lights"—and again the lights were dark. Bohn placed the rod of lead above the square; at once a pallid blue-white glow spread over the surface. The scratches Bohn had made were outlined in white fire, and the square shone like a little window opening on a cloudy night sky. The cold white flame rippled as he moved the rod above it.

The voice of their host sounded: "Try your diamond, Mr. Hoffman." Hoffman slipped a ring from his finger, and held it toward the glowing square. As it approached the wire, the gem began to glow in its setting; it glistened with an icy blue fire far brighter than the square. Hoffman withdrew it, but it continued to flame with undiminished brilliance. The lights flashed on, catching the two engineers blinking

down at the glowing diamond.

"IT WILL fluoresce for some time to come," said Edmond. "At least, you may be assured that the gem is genuine; imitations will not react." He paused. "Is there anything further?"

"We are convinced," said Bohn shortly. "Will you explain your methods?"

"In part." Edmond drew a cigarette from a box beside him, and passed them to the engineers. Hoffman accepted one, but Bohn shook his head and drew out his pipe. Their host exhaled a long plume of smoke.

"Obviously," he continued, "the simplest way to break up an atom is through sympathetic vibration. The same principle as breaking a glass goblet by playing a violin above it at the proper pitch."

"That's an old idea," said Hoffman, "but it never worked."

"No; because no one has been able to produce a vibration of great enough frequency. The electrons of most substances have revolution periods measurable in millionths of a second.

"However, certain rays are known that have frequencies of this order; I refer to the so-called cosmic rays."

"Bah!" said Bohn. "I suppose you produce cosmic rays!"

"No," said Edmond, staring coldly at him.

"To continue: It has also been observed that lead exposed to the weather for a long period of years becomes mildly radioactive. All the fools now occupying chairs of research have attributed this to sunlight. Of course, they are wrong; it is due to the cosmic rays.

"Therefore, I have designed this reflector"—he tapped the bowl—"which brings the cosmic rays which enter this room to a focus, intensifying their ef-

fect a thousandfold. That is what starts the disintegration of the lead; once begun, the process is self-continuous." He paused again. "Do you wish to ask any questions?"

"Yes," said both men at once. Hoffman fell silent, and Bohn spoke, apparently somewhat subdued.

"I have always understood that cosmic rays have unparalleled penetrative power, passing far into the deepest mines, and that even gold is very transparent to them. It is generally believed that nothing will reflect them."

"Almost nothing, Mr. Bohn. My reflector will."

"But what material do you use?"

"Did you ever hear of neutronium, Mr. Bohn?"

"Neutronium!" both men spoke.

"That," said Hoffman, "is the stuff that's left after all the electrons are driven off. Neutronium is solid protons, and weighs about one ton to the cubic inch."

"But that stuff is simply hypothetical," objected Bohn.

"Not quite hypothetical, Mr. Bohn. It occurs in the dwarf stars, for instance, and in other places."

"Where, for example?"

"In this room, Mr. Bohn. I have caused an infinitesimal layer of it to be created on the reflecting side of this wooden bowl, a deposit inconceivably thin—perhaps only two or three protons deep. Nevertheless, it is sufficient. Doubtless you noticed the weight."

"Yes." He stared at the black concavity on the table. "By what means do you perform this?"

"By means I shall not reveal, because it is dangerous."

"Dangerous! You needn't be solicitous of our safety!"

"I am not, but of my own. The process is economically dangerous."

"Bah! That's what people thought

about every practical advance, from steam engines on!"

"Yes," said Edmond, "and I know of none that has not been perverted to destruction." For the first time in the interview he smiled, and the men flushed angrily. "Would you place hand grenades in the paws of all the apes in the zoo, Mr. Bohn? Neither shall I." He crushed out his cigarette in an ash tray with an air of closing the subject, and turned to Hoffman.

"You wished to ask a question, Mr. Hoffman."

THE other leaned forward, peering at Edmond through his eye-glasses.

"Will this process disintegrate other elements besides lead, Mr. Hall?"

"A few, but the process is infinitely slower."

"Why is that?"

"There are several reasons. Primarily, because lead is itself more or less unstable in structure. Then, neutronium in this very thin deposit reflects the particular ray that affects lead in greater degree; in other words, my reflector has a sort of cosmic color. Again, the lead radiations form the greater portion of the cosmic rays themselves, for a reason I have not bothered to ascertain; they too are leaden-hued. That is, of course, why leaden roofs and gutters are activated after long exposure to weather, while zinc or iron or cooper ones are not."

"I see," said Hoffman slowly. "Say, how long have you been working on this, Mr. Hall?"

"About six weeks," said Edmond coldly, ignoring the look of amazement on the faces of his guests. He continued: "I think we have covered sufficient ground here. You may send for these four reflectors; they will treat enough lead for your present capacity. Should increased production necessitate

any addition, I will supply them. You may install these in any part of your plant; the cosmic rays are but slightly diffused by passing through the building. The technique of the actual handling of the filament I will leave to you, but be sure to safeguard your workers with lead-foil lined gloves against radium burns."

He rose, and the others followed.

"I'll take this one with me, if you don't mind," said Bohn, lifting the wooden bowl from the table with some effort. The three passed into the hall. "Homo!" called Edmond sharply, and from somewhere in the darkness of the hall the monkey scampered, leaping to his shoulder, and crouching there. As they were descending the stairs, Hoffman noticed their host glance backward at the lighted rectangle of laboratory door; instantly the lights went out. The engineer made no comment, but drew a deep breath when the front door had closed upon them. He followed Bohn, who staggered ahead under the weight he bore, and helped him slide the bowl to the floor of their car.

"What d'you think of it, Carl?" said Hoffman, as the car moved.

"Don't know."

"D'you believe that stuff about cosmic rays and neutronium?"

"We'll damn soon find out when I get to the lab. I got some lead there that I know isn't doctored."

They were silent for several blocks.

"Say, Carl, did you see him put out the lights?"

"Trick. He did it with his feet."

"But he put 'em out from the hall when we were going."

"Switch in the hall."

But Hoffman, less solid in outlook, more mystical than Bohn, remained unconvinced. The curious Edmond had impressed him deeply, and he found his character far less repulsive at this

second meeting. There was a sort of fascination about the man.

"Do you think he knows as much as he says he does?"

"If he does, he's the devil."

"Yes, I thought that too, Carl."

The car drew up before the Stoddard plant, and the two scrambled out.

"Lend me a hand, Mac, and I'll damn soon find out what this thing is."

But Bohn never did. He blunted innumerable knives on the black surface, and dented it very easily with a chisel, but never managed to collect enough of the stuff to analyze. The deposit was far too thin, a tenuous coating of something heavy that nothing could dislodge.

CHAPTER VII

The Seed of Power

SEVERAL weeks later Edmond sold his Stoddard at a fourteen point profit, and unemotionally watched it climb to more than forty. Then he set about securing his radium; part of it he was able to obtain from a domestic producer, and the remainder from Europe. He owned finally ten grams of a salty white crystalline powder—the sulphide of radium—and he had paid about fifty thousand dollars for this somewhat less than a spoonful. He had, however, a constant source of niton, in minute quantities, it is true, but invariable and practically eternal. Nor was it an unwise purchase from any standpoint, for the radium was readily salable at any time.

He turned his energies again to the more complete solution of the mystery of matter. Niton, the gaseous emanation evolved by radium from its own decay, is in itself decaying, its own atoms bursting, consuming themselves in the long series of disintegrating ele-

ments whose end-product is lead. But niton is infinitely more active than its parent radium, and from its exploding atoms Edmond hoped to produce an intense beam of rays of the cosmic order by throwing these atoms into inconceivably rapid oscillation. To this end he enclosed the evanescent gas in a little globular bulb, on one hemisphere of which he caused to form an infinitely thin deposit of neutronium which was to serve both as a shield and a reflector for the beam. At opposite points on the globe's equator—the juncture of the black and clear hemispheres, he placed the slender platinum electrodes that were to admit to the gas an interrupted current of infinitesimal period; it remained now to produce an interrupter, a circuit-breaker, capable of breaking his current into bursts whose period compared to the almost instantaneous periods of revolving electrons.

Edmond resumed his consideration of the atom disrupter. He had now, in his niton tube, an oscillator capable of responding to the stimulus of such an electric stress as he contemplated; it remained for him to produce an alternator of sufficient frequency. He wanted now an alternating electric current of such short period that the already active niton atoms should be wrenched and strained so violently that the gamma radiations increase their hardness to the vastly higher scale of the cosmic rays. Out of their torture he wished to wrest those mysterious impulses that signal the birth-throes of atoms.

What agent could he use? Certainly no mechanical device could attain the nearly infinite frequency he required; even the discharge of a condenser fell far short. He discarded likewise the agency of chemistry; ions could not vibrate with violence sufficient to destroy themselves. His search limited

itself of necessity to the more subtle field that lay within the atom; only electrons possessed the colossal, fluent velocity he needed. For many hours he sat toying with the problem, and the solution eluded him; finally he wearied of the glare of light in his laboratory and descended to the floor below. Evening was falling, unseen in the black-windowed room he quitted; its dusk was already in the hall and the library, though a low sun still gilded the living-room wall. Homo skipped frantically about his cage in the library; his chattering was a summons to Edmond, who released the exuberant creature, permitting it to scamper to his shoulder. He seated himself in his usual chair before the fireplace and gave himself to his thoughts. These were not sombre; the spur of obstacles, strange to his experience, gave a piquancy to the problem.

"IT HAS long been suspected," he reflected, "that the laws of the conservation of energy and of mass are the same law; this means in effect that translation of matter to energy is possible, and conversely, one must be able to create matter out of pure energy. And, of course, the relation becomes more obvious when it is realized that energy itself has mass; light, the purest form of energy known, obeys the laws of mechanics as docilely as a baseball tossed into the air."

Then he reverted to the immediate problem of his interrupter. By degrees, even this yielded to the inhuman ingenuity of his twin minds. By the time Magda announced dinner, he had a tentative solution, and before the end of his after-dinner cigarette, he had evolved a mechanism that might, he believed, serve his purpose. He returned to his laboratory in the evening and set about the business of construct-

ing the device.

He took two tiny pillars of his A-lead, and caused the two electron beams to interfere; along the combined stream he passed his current. Thus he had an interrupter whose period was measurable in millionths of a second; by adjusting the relative positions of his A-lead pillars, he could reduce it to billionths. His current traversed a stream of electrons that flowed in little instantaneous bursts, whose frequency he controlled. Thus Edmond constructed his atom disrupter, and only when it was complete did he pause to reflect, and question himself why.

"For what reason, to what purpose, do I create a device that, though it will release limitless energy for society's service, can also unleash power enough to tumble the earth out of its orbit? I neither love man enough to grant him the power of the gods, nor hate him so bitterly as to place in his hands his—and my own—destruction."

And he answered himself: "My only impulse in this creation has been the escape of boredom. I labor to no end at all; thus again I am faced by that which blocks all efforts everywhere—futility."

Nevertheless, he was avidly curious to watch the release of that power which was all but legendary, which had always glowed just beyond the horizon of physics like a never rising sun. The declaration of futility was a rational thing as yet; for this time he had no real sense nor feeling of it, but rather a resurgence of strong pride in his achievement. He felt indeed a species of elation very foreign to his somber nature; he alone held the key to the twin doors of salvation and destruction, his decision. "I am the only being in this part of the universe who holds such a key; by virtue of it I will rule or destroy as I will."

THEN to watch the atom-blaster perform. He selected a tiny speck of potassium to disrupt—a piece smaller by far than the head of an average pin. This element he chose because of its comparative rarity; he did not wish to adjust his radiations to calcium or iron or aluminum and find stray beams disintegrating the walls of his house with perhaps enough accidental violence to blast into dust all that hundred mile city whose nucleus is Chicago. This tiny speck, still moist with oil, he placed on a square of tile at the estimated focus of his niton tube. He sat for a moment making his calculations, building in his mental view a potassium atom, selecting a key electron whose period he must determine. Then he adjusted the twin pillars of his interrupter with incredible delicacy, and thereafter stood with his hand on the switch of the motor generator surveying the various parts of the device. In a moment he dropped the switch and removed the speck of potassium from the tile; it had occurred to him that the tile itself might contain potassium salts, and certainly the allied sodium; a slight error in the setting of his interrupter would blast the sister element into a terrific volcano of destruction. It was the nearest to error he had ever come throughout his life.

He tipped the bit of metal to a leaden disc, stepped back to the far corner of the room, and threw the switch. The generator hummed; the tube of niton glowed with its characteristic violet; now through the clear half of the bulb he believed a stream of cosmic rays was pouring—not the diffuse and mild rays that flowed out of space, but an intense beam like that of a search-light. Yet the potassium remained unaltered.

He cut the switch, and again adjusted his interrupter, at a guess to a slightly lower frequency. Again he set

the generator spinning.

Instantly it came. Where the speck of metal had rested hovered a two foot roaring sphere of brilliant violet light, whose heat singed his eyebrows, whose terrible flames were unfaceable. Reverberations pounded his ear-drums, and great lightninglike discharges leaped from his clothing. The room reeled in a crescendo of crashes; the terrific flaming ball that hovered above the table seemed to his half-blinded gaze to expand like a trap-door into Hell. A second—two seconds—it flared—then with a dying crackle of sparks it dissipated, darkened, dropped into nothingness. A strong odor of ozone swept the room and Edmond dropped his blistered hands from his eyes, to gaze dazzled at the aftermath of wreckage. A pool of molten lead lay on the table, about whose edge the wood flamed. He quickly smothered the conflagration with the contents of a flower pot, and examined the rest of the room's equipment. Surprisingly, the damage was slight. His niton tube was in splinters and his interrupter in fragments; no matter—they could be replaced should he ever desire.

He realized that he never would. The experiment was finished—completed—his interest in it had vanished. Let the earth-wrecker lie destroyed and unrecorded, let men suck the little dribbles of energy they had always used. The spray from this ocean he had tapped; he wished neither to rule nor to destroy.

He summoned Homo to his knees and sat for a long time surveying the cold hearth.

CHAPTER VIII

Friendship and Humor

AFTER the experiment of the atom-breaker and its culmination, that

sense of futility which Edmond had reasoned but not felt appeared in reality. He grew weary of knowledge, since it led nowhere but only seemed to point a way, like a will-o'-the-wisp across a swamp. He perceived that all knowledge was useless, since all generalities were false. If no Absolutes existed, science itself must consist of merely relative truths. The pursuit of science was no more than the grubbing out of an infinity of little facts whose sum total was zero. All effort, he thought, was bounded by that one impenetrable spell that was called futility. His twin minds dissociated; he permitted them to trace out each its own ratiocinations.

"Every effort is foredoomed to be in vain," he reflected, "but living is only to struggle against this doom. Life is that which fights futility, and is to this extent free."

"Every effort is foredoomed," said his other self, taking this same point of departure, "and rational living is to recognize this doom and cease to struggle against it. This is to be really free."

Then his being merged into a unity, promulgating the conclusion he derived from these divergent courses of reason.

"Only one thing is certain; that truth is a subjective idea void of reality, and is wholly relative to the point of view."

For some time Edmond abandoned his laboratory, pursuing knowledge of a different sort. Thrust into a world peopled by human beings, he now devoted his time to a survey of their society, and an analysis of their functioning. He had, of course, long since realized that he was somehow a being apart from these, one whose appearance, whose very mind, was alien to them. He wished, therefore, to acquire a viewpoint to enable him to understand those among whom he moved, or if they proved too utterly foreign, to at least appreciate wherein lay the differences.

To Edmond who saw all things from two viewpoints, the world was a highly complex organization quite incomprehensible to beings of single minds.

"All creatures live in a world just greater than their ability to conceive," he reflected. "The worm, blind and possessing only the single sense of touch, lives in a world of one dimension, but beings from outside stab at him and devour.

"I go now into that Elfhome of Cabell's, where things have only one side, but I anticipate the findings there of no Thin Queen."

So Edmond locked the door upon a room of wonders, abandoning there his quest for truth through the maze of natural things. For he foresaw that the facets of the jewel were infinite, and that a greater intelligence than his would yet fail to isolate truth in a laboratory. He opened another door upon the colossus of the city, and stepped into the streaming life that flowed about him.

DISREGARDING his roadster that stood at the curb, he walked east to Sheridan Road, to board a bus. The day was crisp late Autumn; leaves crunched underfoot as he walked. Trim women passed him with a single glance, a man or two with none at all. At the corner half a dozen people waited; Edmond scanned them with his instantaneous glance. He attempted to read their characters from their features; he failed and knew that he failed. Two of them, girls in sleek cloth coats with caressing fur about their throats were talking; the rest stood in that frigid silence characteristic of an unacquainted group. He listened casually.

"Paul's bringing two or three with him tonight—one's a critic on the *State Herald*."

The slender dark one speaking.

"Paul's the only one that's got anything. He's a thrill, Vanny."

"Think so? Come on over, if you like; it's just an informal bull-session."

"No bridge?"

"Not with this bunch of literary lights. The supreme egotists are your literati, and bridge requires a partner."

Edmond glanced at the speaker's face, unexpectedly meeting her eyes. He bowed in recognition, and the girl smiled a perfunctory smile. It was Evanne Marten of his school days, grown, he thought, rather lovely in a dark, lithe way. She had an air of being always taut as a watch spring, an élan, a vivacity, that had come of her childish sauciness. When the bus stopped, he watched the smooth flash of her legs as she mounted the step, watched without any emotion but with a distinct aesthetic appreciation.

The two girls turned into the interior; Edmond chose to ride above, where smoking was permitted. As he moved up the narrow stairway he heard the voice of her companion, "Who's the queer boy friend, Vanny?" and Vanny's answering laugh. He smiled a little to himself and thought no more of it for that time. He permitted his mind to roam at random, absorbing the unceasing roar of traffic, the buoyant life that flowed in a river of steel about him, in the middle distance the flash of the lake under a morning sun.

He watched Vanny and her companion alight; they marched briskly along Michigan toward a row of shops, turned into one—"Veblis—Chapeaux." The bridge with its sentinel skyscrapers. After a few blocks he got off, turned west into the Loop. He drifted with the crowd and sought to identify himself with it.

AFTER a time, he turned into a motion picture theatre—the first time

since his latter childhood. He followed the play with interest, absorbed not by the puerile story nor the caricatures that passed as characterization but by the revelations of the minds that created and the minds that enjoyed these things. Through the play he saw both author and audience. He wondered mildly at what he perceived.

"If this level strikes the average of humanity's intelligence, then the world lies ready for my taking."

He reflected further.

"What I see here is again the crowd, and therefore no true standard by which to judge. The mob-man is the composite picture of his component men; all fine shadings are lost in the dominant and primal influences. A man may be intelligent enough, but the mob-man never; and it is this being I see reflected here, for audiences are in a true sense mobs."

He left the theatre and turned down State Street, passing gradually from the flooded noon-day canyons of the Loop into streets of lower buildings and drab little shops. A panhandler sidled up to him with a low whine; Edmond tossed him a quarter without listening or looking. From a basement entrance a dog rushed out at him barking and snapping; with experienced skill, he dealt the cur a sharp blow with his cane.

"Man and his ally the dog both perceive in me the Enemy," he thought. "Why am I the Enemy? For what obscure reason am I placed here solitary, foredoomed to defeat, my only safety to assume the disguise of humanity? Something has gone wrong with the progression of the ages, and I am born long out of my time."

A window to his left caught his eye, a cheap little shop that did framing and sold the intolerable prints hung in the rooms of the neighborhood. There were a number of them in the window, but

what Edmond saw was a little landscape in oils—a canvas no greater than six inches by ten. A curious little thing—nothing more than a tree, a rock, and a dusky sky, and these a trifle twisted, but somehow it seemed to convey a meaning. Something formless and inchoate, but a symbol nevertheless. It was an experience unique to him; he marveled that so simple a thing could arouse a tinge of feeling in his icy being. He entered, and stood before a dusty counter piled with framing. A nondescript man emerged from the rear.

"I want that oil you have in the window."

"Yes, sir," said the man, and procured it, placing it before Edmond. "Very pretty little picture, isn't it, sir?"

"No," said Edmond, examining it. Certainly it was not a pretty picture; there was an air of horror about the scene, as of some region foreign to reason, a glimpse of an insane world. He scanned the unusually lucid script—*Sarah Maddox*.

"Who painted this?"

"I don't really know, sir. They come in here to sell 'em when they're broke; sometimes I never see 'em twice. I remember it was a sort of thin woman, but most of 'em are that way." He frowned in concentration. "Wait a minute; I think I paid her by check, and sometimes I put the address on the stub, in case the work sells good."

He thumbed through some stubs, then shook his head.

"The check was made out to cash. I didn't think her work would take, you see."

"How much is it?"

The man looked at him appraisingly.

"Eight dollars, sir."

EDMOND paid and left, carrying the picture wrapped in a square of brown paper. He wandered on. He

was somewhat surprised at the unattainability of man the individual. How did one pick up acquaintances? He considered approaching one of the numerous idlers he passed, and rejected the plan, knowing from experience how he would be received. He walked on, back toward the towered heart of the city. A bookstore. He entered, glanced over the shelves of volumes. A clerk spoke to him by name; he had made previous purchases there.

"What book," said Edmond, "do you find the most popular at this time?"

The clerk smiled, and tapped a pile of little booklets before him. Edmond recognized them from various references he had seen in the newspapers; they held the autobiography of one who specialized in a lowly type of architecture.

"I don't think you'd care for this, Mr. Hall," said the clerk, recalling certain previous purchases of Edmond's. "It's supposed to be humorous."

"I want one, however."

He took the thin little volume to a chair beside a table; in half an hour he had perused it.

"I lack all humor save irony," he thought. "Until I can understand this element in men their minds will elude me. I think that humor in itself is the enjoyment of disaster to others; people constitutionally hate each other, and the reason they band together in tribes and nations is merely that they fear nature and foreigners more deeply."

He slipped the booklet into his pocket, picked up his package, and again departed. The early setting sun of Autumn was already behind the buildings; the streets were beginning to chill. He hooked his cane over his arm and walked toward the lake; he turned north on Michigan, walking idly, aimlessly. The sense of futility was on him again; he forebore even to think.

It seemed to him that he could never bridge the hiatus that lay between him and humanity; alien he was, and was doomed to remain. To make friends was an impossible feat; among the millions about him he walked solitary. He watched the flood of impatient cars jostle each other in a vast medley of motion, and walked and walked; he was lonely.

HE PASSED the Drake. Beyond, the graying lake broke close to the street; some benches caught his eye and he crossed over to rest, for the long walking of the day had tired him a little. He sat down and lit a cigarette, watching the play of shadows between the wave crests. He felt desolate, futile.

A figure passed before him, turned and repassed, seating itself on the next bench a few yards to his left. He smoked silently. The figure suddenly moved to his side; he sensed it now as a woman, but made no move.

"Got the blues, huh?"

He turned. She was one of the ageless creatures of the modern city, wearing a mask of powder, her cheeks bright even in the dimming light.

"Yes," he said.

"Maybe I could cheer you up?" It was a question.

"Sit here a while. I should like to talk to you."

"Gosh, no sermons, Mister! I heard 'em all!"

"No. No sermons. I merely wish to talk to you."

"Well, I'm here."

Edmond drew the booklet he had purchased from his pocket.

"Have you read this?"

She leaned over, peering at the title, and smiled.

"Huh, and I thought for a minute you were some kind of a preacher. No,

I ain't read it, but a regular—a friend of mine, he tells me about it. I got a laugh."

"It is very funny, isn't it?"

"Yeah, the part where he falls in." She laughed. "The girls nearly passed out, the way he told it."

Edmond passed her the book.

"You may have this copy."

"Thanks." There was a moment's pause.

"Say, ain't we going somewhere?"

"I want to talk to you a while."

"Well, I gotta live."

"Yes," said Edmond; "that *is* true, from one viewpoint."

"Talking don't buy no groceries. I gotta live."

"Why?"

"Why? What's the idea? Everybody's gotta live, don't they?"

"People seem to believe so."

"Say, what's the matter with you? Don't you like me?"

"As well as I like any person."

"Say, who do you think you are, anyway?"

"That," said Edmond, "is something I have often wondered."

He stood up; his companion rose with him. He drew a bill from his pocket—five dollars, he noticed, and passed it to her.

"Good evening," he said.

"Is that all you want?"

"Yes."

"Well, for God's sake! Turned down! I never been so—Say, I know what's wrong with you! You must be queer!"

Edmond stared at her coldly. Suddenly a flame filled his eyes. He raised his arm, holding his hand before her face. Above his palm, his fingers writhed and twisted like five little snakes. He wriggled them before her eyes; they coiled about each other. The woman stared in frozen fascina-

tion for a moment, then shrieked, backed away, and fled over the clipped grass toward the street.

"That," said Edmond, as he reseated himself, and reached for another cigarette, "is humor!"

CHAPTER IX

The Study of Man

"AN ENTOMOLOGIST," thought Edmond from his chair before the fire, "studies one variety of insect after another, learning their different life cycles and diverse habits."

"I spend my time unprofitably observing this single ant-heap of Chicago; perhaps I can learn what I wish by comparison with others."

Thus, leaving Homo in Magda's care, Edmond set out to travel. He viewed New York with little interest, sailing immediately for Liverpool because at the moment that route was most convenient. Thereafter he visited France for some months, liking best of all regions the country of the Spanish border with its magnificent uplands.

French and German he had as a heritage of his school days; other tongues came to him with an incredible facility, so that as he wandered he absorbed the dialect of his locale with chameleon-like rapidity. Yet his quest was fruitless insofar as the study of men went, for he found no differences save superficial ones.

He visited the bookstores in Paris and Venice, and added greatly to his collection. Several times he found curious volumes that surprised him—a little undated manuscript detailing a queer jest of Gilles de Retz, a tiny volume of twelve pages describing Roger Bacon's experiment with a mechanical head. And there were others.

"Am I really the first of my kind?" he wondered. "Perhaps in other ages an individual or so of us may have existed, solitary as I am solitary, lonely as I." The thought imparted to him a feeling of great sadness. "Their works lie here neglected, understood dimly or not at all, while lesser genius is enthroned."

So he wandered, sometimes rewarded, sometimes prey to a vast boredom and a sense of futility that nothing ever quite eradicated. About a year after this departure, he suddenly abandoned his quest and sailed from Havre.

"*Homo Sapiens* is a single species," he concluded, "and, the world over, there exist no important differences save those of custom. Herein lies the reason for the recession of romantic color; there is nowhere anything unique. All people are merely types, members of a class, and no one anywhere merits the article 'the.' The Kraken has vanished from men's consciousness, and instead we have whales. The Golden Fleece has sunk into a legend of tradesmen."

He arrived at the house on Kenmore some hours after Homo coughed a final weak cough and succumbed at last to the unnatural climate, and a window Magna forgot to close. Edmond was somewhat moved as he gazed at the little furry body.

"So passes my single friend, and the only being whose presence I could miss. To my one friendship, therefore, I now erect a memorial."

HE TOOK the small corpse to his long-locked laboratory, emerging some time later with a tiny articulated skull. Thereafter he sent for a mason, and had this strange memento inset into the stonework above the library fireplace, whence its hollow gaze was fixed forever on his favored chair. Here he seated himself at the completion of the

work, turning contemplative eyes on the empty ones that had been Homo's. Thus he sat silent for a long time, following out a course of thought that lay mostly beyond the regions enterable by words. Finally he stirred himself, being weary of thinking, and lit a cigarette with dexterous hands.

"Homo," he said, "is released from the innumerable petty illusions that harass life. He knows not even that he knows not, and is infinitely wiser than he was when he perhaps thought himself wise. . . . For the most barren of all is the illusion of knowledge, which is a negative illusion, so that the more a man learns the less he knows." His eyes turned to the little landscape by Sarah Maddox that hung to the right of the mantel; as he gazed at it obliquely, it seemed again that he looked through a window at a strange world.

"What is to be done now?" he thought. "Let me take my cue again from the naturalist—when he has studied the habits of his subject, he secures a specimen to examine at leisure, under the microscope if he will. It is for me now to secure myself a specimen."

But how? How should he, to whom even the making of a friend was an obstacle insurmountable, lure a human being to his side, to live with him, speak without reserve to him, that he might study at leisure the human mind? Magda? Too poor a specimen, he thought; too solid and stupid to show the full phenomena of mentality, and, furthermore, too unaesthetic.

"If I may not make a friend, I can at least hire one under pretext of needing a guide or instructor," he thought, and dismissed the matter for that time.

He heard the buzz of the doorbell, and Magda's cumbrous tread. In a moment she entered the library, bulk-

ing through the arch like a little planet.

"She moves in orbits," thought Edmond, continuing the simile, "and completes a revolution once a day. Her sun is the kitchen stove, her room and the front door her aphelion and perihelion."

"There's a man to see you, Mr. Hall. He's been here a dozen times. Oldish with glasses." She extended a card.

"Alfred Stein, Department of Electro-physics, Northwestern University."

A picture of the lecture hall returned to Edmond's mind, the amiable little professor bustling about with his chalk and pointer, his own rare interest. It was very recently that Stein had published his most revolutionary studies of electrons.

"I will see him, Magda."

EDMOND noted that the professor had changed but little. The iron-gray hair, he thick-lensed spectacles, the droop of the shoulders, were all as they had been in the class room.

"Mr. Hall?" said the professor, with a smile. "I am Alfred Stein of Northwestern. I have done some work with radioactive elements, and that interest brings me here."

"I am familiar with your work, Professor Stein," said Edmond, "having attended several of your courses in 1920."

"Ach, I should perhaps have remembered."

"Not at all; they were simply lecture courses. I have followed your work since, however."

The other beamed.

"That pleases me, Mr. Hall. It is something I seldom hear. And you agree with me?"

"I do not question your figures," said Edmond, "but your inferences are erroneous."

The professor winced.

"Well, let us not argue that. When

someone offers a better hypothesis, I will listen. Meanwhile I am satisfied with mine."

Edmond nodded, and was silent. The little man blinked at him through his thick lenses, and continued.

"I am very much interested in this stuff you call Activated Lead, that the Stoddard company is using for filaments in radio tubes. We bought some of them, and took out the lead, but, frankly, none of us has been able to make much out of it. I went to Stoddard's plant and they gave me some, and also I got a fantastic explanation from a fellow named Hoffman, from whom I had your name. So"—he spread his hands—"I came to you. For a considerable time I have been trying to see you."

"For what purpose?"

"Why, to learn from you the true explanation of this amazing phenomenon."

"I do not doubt that Mr. Hoffman's explanation was accurate to the extent of his knowledge."

"A fairy tale about cosmic rays and neutronium that one does not believe."

"I can offer you no other solution, Professor Stein."

"You say it's true?"

"Yes."

"Bah! That is an impossibility!"

Edmond smiled in his exasperatingly superior manner, but it failed to irritate the other whose blinking nearsighted eyes did not perceive his face except as a blur.

"Listen, my friend! You have a duty to consider. You owe something to the advancement of knowledge, and it is unfair of you to try to conceal any important discovery. The tube is patented; you can lose nothing by explaining."

"You are thinking," Edmond said slowly, "that the material can be used

to replace radium in medical work—the treatment of cancer and the like.”

“Yes, I had thought of it.”

“You would like to patent that application for your personal gain.”

The little professor blinked at him in surprise.

“Why—I give you my word I had no such thought!”

Edmond was slightly puzzled. It was apparent to him that the other was speaking the truth.

“I meet for the first time a true scientist,” he reflected. “Altruism becomes more than a gesture.” He turned to Stein.

“Professor, you are as you say entitled to an explanation. If you will step upstairs with me, I shall endeavor to supply it.”

THEY entered the dark little laboratory with the blackened windows. Stein peered eagerly about as the light flashed on. The fragments of Edmond’s disrupter were still scattered about; the table still showed the blackened pit of the atomic blast. Stein was examining the remnants of the interrupter as Edmond found a small reflector and lifted it to the table.

He repeated in somewhat greater detail the demonstration he had given Bohn and Hoffman. Stein watched him silently, intently; at the conclusion he laughed.

“This much I saw at the Stoddard plant, but they never let me touch their reflectors. I think, if you’ll pardon me, that there is a trick.”

“One can hardly wonder at their solicitous care of the reflectors,” said Edmond. “They are irreplaceable—except by me.”

“I should like to know how you make this so-called neutronium.”

Edmond shook his head. “I cannot reveal that.”

Stein chuckled. “Either way I don’t blame you. If this is a fraud, certainly not—and if it’s true, the danger in the hands of industry is appalling.”

“You have my reason.”

“Which one?” said Stein, and chuckled again. “Well, we have reached an impasse.”

“Not necessarily,” said Edmond. “I offer you this reflector—in return for a service and under conditions.”

“The conditions?”

“Primarily that you make no more A-lead than you must to study the device, as the element is dangerous, and as indestructible as any element.”

“That is easy.”

“Then of course the material must be kept out of the channels of trade. Should you accumulate a surplus, it must be delivered to Stoddard.”

“That too is easy.”

“That is all.”

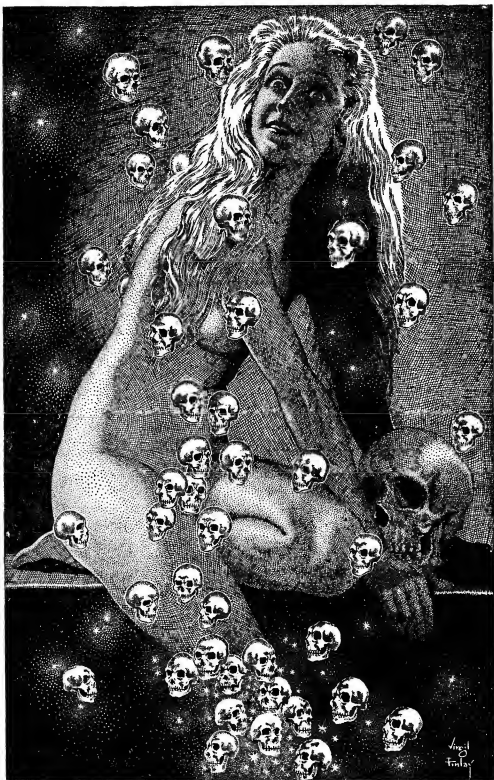
“But the service?”

“Yes,” said Edmond, “the service. In return for the gift of the reflector, I wish your aid in some social research I am doing. I should like to know more about people and their lives, and you will spend a certain amount of time as my guide and instructor. We shall explore the human ramifications of the city.”

Stein laughed. “Ach, at that I would be a failure! I know less than any one about people and their lives.” He paused a moment. “See here, I will do this. What you need is a young sophisticate, some one who knows the town and is in touch with the people you seek. Me, I am a hermit almost, but I know a young man who would serve well.”

“I will pay for his services,” said Edmond.

“You should know him. He was at N. U. about the same time you were. His father is in the English department



His life with her was impossible; to him she was the symbol of death!

—Professor Varney."

"Yes," said Edmond. "I remember Paul Varney. We were at high school together as well."

"I will send him to see you. He has been trying to make a living by writing and will welcome a little additional compensation."

"I shall be grateful," said Edmond. "This reflector is small and not very heavy. You may either take it or send for it."

Stein picked up the bowl, tucked it under his arm.

"Thank you," he said. "If this fails Paul won't be around to see you."

CHAPTER X

Guinea Pig

SEVERAL days later Edmond returned from a casual walk to the lake shore to find a slender blond young man awaiting him, who forced a smile to his sensitive mouth.

"Good afternoon, Paul."

Paul's grin became more strained as he extended his hand. A shudder shook him as Edmond's supple fingers closed on it.

"Strange," reflected Edmond, "that the few women I have encountered have not hated me so intensely." He formulated his own reply. "Men hate their masters; women love them."

He led the way into the library.

"Sit down, Paul."

Paul seated himself, gazing curiously at the titles of the volumes that lined the walls. The skull of Homo above the fireplace startled him for a moment.

"Professor Stein asked me to call here."

"Doubtless he explained what I desire."

"To some extent. I gathered that you wanted a sort of guide to Chicago's

night life." Paul smiled nervously. "I supposed you were writing a book."

"Not exactly," said Edmond, watching his companion. "But that will develop later. I will undertake to pay whatever expenses we incur, and will give you, say ten dollars per evening." In his mind's background he was reflecting, "This one will serve; this is a good specimen. High strung and sensitive, his reactions show on the surface for my observation."

"That is more than fair," said Paul a little bitterly. "I cannot afford to reject it."

"Then it is settled. I shall require you for a month or longer, though perhaps not every evening." He reached for the inevitable cigarette; Paul shifted as if to rise. "I understand that you still write."

"I am trying, or rather failing, to make a living at it."

"What type of writing?"

"Mostly poetry. I try my hand at a short story now and then."

"Have you any with you?"

Paul shook his head.

"Perhaps a note book? Or a few fragments?"

Reluctantly Paul drew a paper covered note book from his pocket. "I had rather not show these. They are merely jottings for the most part, and nothing finished."

"I am neither writer nor critic. You need fear neither ridicule nor plagiarism; it is merely that I wish to understand you. It occurs to me that a glance at your work may supplant some hours of getting acquainted."

Paul silently passed the note book to Edmond who spun the pages with his miraculous rapidity. Twice he paused for a longer glance. Paul fidgeted in his chair, watching the facile hands. As always, they fascinated him. Finally he selected a cigarette from the box

beside him, lit it, and smoked in silence; after a moment more his companion flipped the last pages, glanced casually at them, and returned the booklet.

"You didn't read a great deal of it," remarked Paul, as he dropped it into his pocket.

"I read all of it."

The other looked his incredulity, but said nothing.

"There is one fragment that merits completion," continued Edmond, "the ballad that begins,

Thotmes, loud tramping over Abyssinia,

Swearing an oath of vengeance on its king

Seized then the ebon monarch's first-born Musa,

Blasted his manhood as a shameful thing.

Thotmes of Egypt, mighty builder of images,

Graven at Karnak, Lord of the North and South,

Made of the tall black prince a slave, first tearing

The tongue that cursed him from the bleeding mouth.'

HIS cold tones ceased for the moment, then continued.

"It will doubtless surprise you to know that something similar actually occurred, though not exactly as you have noted it in your synopsis." He turned his intense eyes again on Paul. "Would you like me to tell you the story as it should be written?"

"If you think you can." Paul's mouth tightened into the trace of a sneer.

For some minutes thereafter Paul listened with a growing horror and a curious fascination to the meters that flowed in icy tones from his companion.

"Thus it goes," said Edmond at the conclusion. "It is susceptible to much

polish as I gave it, since I do not pretend to be a poet. The thing is yours to use if you wish, though"—he smiled—"I do not imagine that a very large portion of the public would approve of it. However, I am glad to note that your work escapes at least one fault; few creatures to my mind are so valueless as the poet who writes vapid optimism about this somewhat horrible process of living."

Paul departed, feeling dazed, and not a little angry. He felt somehow as though he had been subjected to innumerable subtle insults, though exactly how he did not understand.

The following evening at the appointed hour he presented himself at Edmond's home, finding his strange employer twirling the leaves of a book.

"Tonight you shall take me to some place of amusement," he said as Paul waited, "where there is music and dancing."

"The crowd is going to Spangli's just now."

"Spangli's will do," said Edmond rising. "I have been there."

"Why on earth do you need me as guide, if you've been there?"

"You shall interpret for me."

They entered the low roadster; Paul marveled at the liquid ease with which the vehicle slid through traffic. The car seemed elastic and flexible as a living, sentient being.

At Spangli's they seated themselves at an obscure corner table, whence the panorama of the room was observable as from a vantage point. The orchestra was resting for the moment; a clatter of conversation and laughter assailed their ears. Paul was silent, a little puzzled as to just what was expected around him. A waiter came up; they ordered.

WITH a moan of chords, the orchestra swung into action. Several

couples rose and moved to the dance floor, followed by most of the remainder. Everyone, it seemed, was young; skirts which last year had swept the floor were this year almost non-existent, and the girls moved with the slim charm of youth. They swung into their partner's arms with an eager buoyancy, merged into a rippling stream of dancers that drifted past. Paul watched them sympathetically; Edmond with a more critical observation.

"Do you like to dance, Paul?"

"Why—of course."

"What is the nature of your enjoyment?"

"Well," said Paul reflectively, "it is a pleasure allied to music and poetry, melody and meter. One naturally enjoys the harmonious mingling of sound, motion and rhythm. There is a pleasure in using one's muscles gracefully." He paused.

"Explain it to me as if I were utterly strange to any of these feelings you describe, like a being from another planet."

"You are," thought Paul, "or else crazy." But he continued: "Dancing is as truly a creative art as any other, since it produces the sense of beauty, if only for the participants. In the circle of the arts, it verges into dramatic art or acting on the one side, and into sculpture and painting on the other. It is an evanescent art, dying as soon as created, but so too is the playing of music. And of all arts it is the most widely practiced; vast numbers of people have no other means of self-expression."

Edmond, who had followed this with apparent intentness, crushed out his cigarette and smiled. Paul wondered momentarily whether his every smile was a sneer because of some distorted facial muscles. "A sort of Gwynplaine," he phrased it to himself.

"I will tell you what I think," said Edmond. "I think that all dancing of whatever sort, is sexual, allied to the wooing dances of birds, and that ball room dancing is most purely erotic. It represents a secret triumph over the conventions."

Paul smiled. "No woman will concede that."

"No, since a woman must seem to be passionate against her will. To be successful—that is, to create the strongest appeal to males—a woman must seem to yield despite her inclinations. This is in the nature of a compliment to a man's attractions." He exhaled a plume of smoke. "Some of our nicest conventions in the attitudes of men and women are based on this fact."

"Well, perhaps you're right. But I think there is a true beauty, a sort of poetry of motion, distinct from sex. The swaying of reeds in a storm, the rippling of a field of grain, these are very lovely things."

"Bah! Your mind translates them to the undulations of female hips."

PAUL shrugged and glanced at the dancing couples on the floor. For the tiniest fraction of a moment he had a curious illusion. From the corner of his eyes his companion seemed to duplicate himself; there was a momentary impression that two men sat facing him, four eyes regarded him steadily. Startled, he altered his oblique glance; his companion sat as before, with a speculative gleam in his bright amber eyes, and feathery smoke stream exhaling from his parted lips. The faintest trace of expression lingered on his usually stony face—amusement, contempt, triumph? Paul could not read it as the thin lips drew another deep draught of smoke. "Probably the lights," he thought, as he turned again toward the floor.

A mass of dark bobbed hair drew his eyes. The girl turned, glanced over her shoulder at him, smiled in recognition.

"Hello, Vanny," he called.

The slow drift of the dancing current brought her closer. She saw Edmond, nodded slightly.

"Come sit at our table," she said as she passed on into the crowd.

Paul's eyes followed her. The music stopped. Her companion took her arm and strolled to a table across the room. Edmond watched the two casually. He was a little charmed by the girl's grace; she bore herself with a pertness and spirit that he liked.

"That's little Vanny Marten. You must remember her from school. Shall we move to their table?"

"I remember her. No," said Edmond. "However, you may do so. This is sufficient for tonight, and I am leaving." He called their waiter and took the check.

"Now what do you suppose," thought Paul, as he watched his employer depart. "What do you suppose he got out of this evening's activities that is worth ten dollars?"

He made his way to Vanny's table still wondering.

"Hello, Paul. What were you doing with him?"

"Hello, Walter. My new job. Pushing him around to study night life."

Vanny laughed. "May keep you away evenings," she mocked. "Never mind—I'll manage without you." She smiled mischievously, and chanted:

*"There was a young fellow named Paul
Whom his friends told to hire a hall,
But the way things fell out,
They were twisted about,
For they found that a Hall hired Paul."*

Walter laughed a trifle loudly; he was

feeling the first exaltation of liquor. Paul grinned, somewhat embarrassed. Walter filled a glass below the table's edge, passed it to him, reaching for Vanny's almost empty one. She refused with a smile and a gesture.

"Practically on the wagon," said Walter.

"No, merely a desire to remain within my capacity."

"How does one learn that?"

"Trial and error. I prefer public trials and private errors."

"Smart girl. System no good for me, though. I always err on the same side."

Paul set down his glass nearly empty. He was still thoughtful, silent. Vanny turned to him.

"What's the matter, Paul? Are you stunned into silence by this brilliant conversation?"

Paul smiled at her.

"I can't get him out of my mind. He's so—well, so abnormal, physically and mentally."

"Ought to be an interesting job."

"Oh, I won't be bored!" He finished the remainder of his glass. "Say, Vanny, you've got a pat sort of mind for impromptu limericks; you should have heard what I heard yesterday afternoon. He reeled off a thousand lines just to show me how it was done."

"Was it good?"

"It was horrible! The man's mind is as agile and snaky as his hands!"

"I'd like to meet him again."

"You never will with my aid," said Paul, with a sudden dark sense of foreboding. He looked at Vanny, whose dark eyes gazed into his without their accustomed sauciness; there was a faint glimmer of anxiety in them.

"Paul! I've never seen you so upset. How can any person affect you so?"

"Ugh!" said Paul, with a shudder. "He's inhuman!"

CHAPTER XI

Lucifer

"WHAT am I?" queried Edmond of himself. "I am certainly not a man such as Paul, and yet I am indubitably male. I am not human in the literal sense, for I possess qualities and capacities that pass the human. Yet I am very closely akin to humanity, since in appearance and in all physical attributes I am allied to them. Save for this, I should believe myself alien to this planet. Since I am unique among its occupants—I should think myself a changeling, a Martian smuggled here by some inconceivable art."

He sat before the skull of Homo, idling an afternoon away in his chair in the library. The empty stare of the little skull drew his attention.

"Your blood is in me, Homo," he continued. "In all respects we show our common origin. My skull is yours grown more capacious, my hands are yours grown extremely agile, my soul is yours grown out of all nature, and my sadness is your joy become intelligent. You are my incontrovertible proof of my own earthly roots, there is no gainsaying our blood relationship when the family resemblance is so strong."

Again he posed his question, "Then what am I?" He turned the problem this way and that in his minds, seeking a point of departure for his line of rational argument. "If I am of human origin but not myself human, there are but three possibilities. The first of these is this: that I am a survival, a throw-back, a reincarnation of some ancient, great race that merged itself with humanity in the dawn before history. The second is this: that I am no more than an accident, utterly unique and without meaning, a sport, a product of

chance, with neither origin nor effect beyond the domain of chance. And the third is that I prognosticate, that I foreshadow the great race to come, that I am indeed the superman born ahead of his appointed time. The solution of my enigma thus resolves itself into the problem of the past, the present, or the future."

He continued, "I reject the first of these, the concept of the past, on grounds logical, since a mighty race in antiquity must certainly have left its impress on the planet that bore it, yet nowhere in the world do I see any ruins save those of human origins. Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, India, China, Yucatan—these remnants are those of human cultures.

"I reject the second possibility, the concept of the present, on grounds ethical, since I possess a strong pride of race and a bitter contempt for those around me. Were I a chance product in the world, should I not envy these other beings, placed here by nature under her own laws and protection? My differences then must be a source of shame rather than the inceptors of this strong pride, this derisive contempt.

"There remains the third possibility, the concept of the future. Since I reject the others, I must accept the last, and believe that I foreshadow the coming of my race, and that I am the har-binger of doom for humanity. I am the Enemy, that which will destroy; I am the replacer of mankind, and the future incarnate."

He stared back at Homo with sombre eyes, meeting the eyeless, vacant, insolent gaze of the little skull.

"I am to man what man was to you, Homo. I am that which devil-worshippers adore, as perhaps your kind adored man, in fear and distrust of a power implacable and beyond understanding. For what else to man is his destroyer,

his Enemy? I am all evil embodied to the human viewpoint. I am the Devil!"

CHAPTER XII

The Brief Pursuit of Power

ONE afternoon Edmond drove his car aimlessly north, through the interminable suburbs of the sprawling city. For a time the effortless speed and vigor of the supple machine diverted him; it was as invigorating to him as if his own muscles thrust him forward, until this too palled. He slowed the swift vehicle, permitted it to idle aimlessly along the white highway, which here paralleled the lake, visible at intervals as a sharp flashing far to his right. A narrow semi-private lane sprang out of the road toward it; at random he drove his car along through a crowding cluster of trees. Now the lane passed just above the lake; a long slope inclined to the top of a little bluff below. Edmond slid his car to the side of the road, and stepped to the ground, walking casually toward the bluff that overlooked the lake.

He sat down, stretched himself on the grassy hill, and watched a tree etch patterns against the sky above him. He gave himself over to his mood. Futility, he thought, hemmed in his every effort; he felt that he could take whatever he might desire, but nothing was worth the taking. Even knowledge and its pursuit had failed him. There remained what? Power? Any terrestrial power lay in his grasp for the using. For a few moments he toyed with the idea, visualizing the means, sketching the plan. Several courses lay open to him, within the limits of his ability—the financial or industrial, through the control of wealth. The martial coup, through the development of invincible weapons. The emotional control—such

power as the great religious leaders wielded in more plastic ages. Or, he reflected, any combination of these three. The second plan held his interest somewhat more strongly than the others; it presented problems of technical difficulty—the design of a weapon and perfecting of an organization—to provide an outlet for his energies.

He entertained no doubt of his abilities. The thing he desired was foredone in his mind; there remained only the deciding to be accomplished. This presented an easy task, for behind the drive of his ennui, his frustration, he realized that he did not want power over human beings. He did not hate them enough to oppress, nor love them well enough to guide. He stared down at a little hill of busy red ants before his feet, watched the creatures scurry about the important business of living and perpetuating.

"As well call myself emperor of these," he thought. He kicked a little sand across the openings, observing the ensuing excitement.

"They fear me as much and know me as little as men. What satisfaction is there to me?"

He lay back in the grass, watching a pale afternoon moon pursue the sun toward the west.

"I rest solidly here on the grass," he thought. "The sun and moon revolve quietly about me; security and peace surround me. Let me alter my viewpoint."

HE gazed again at the moon, seeing it now as a hurtling sphere, trying to visualize his own relation to the immediate cosmos. And suddenly his viewpoint changed; no longer did he rest in safety on a grassy slope, but clung to the surface of a colossal globe that spun at fearful velocity—off at unimaginable distances whirled others

in a gigantic frenzy of chaos—giant spheres whirling endlessly through infinity—blazing and dying and being reborn in fire. He clung to the side of his particular atom a mite, an insect,—while vaster shapes whirled and danced under the blind play of the cosmos.

A leaf drifted from the tree before him. Edmond fixed his attention on it, won back to his normal viewpoint. The sun and moon dropped their mad dancing, moved slowly and majestically once more, and were only a little way above him. He found himself shaken, with his fingers and heels digging into the soft earth in a frenzy of effort to hold on. He sat up, lit a cigarette.

"That is the abyss in which all things dance. What is a dream of power before that?"

He thought for some time of his two vain attempts at happiness.

"The path of Knowledge," he concluded, "while it starts apparently in the proper direction, loses itself and its traveler at last in an endless maze of meandering on an illimitable desert; and the path of Power ends in a blank wall, and is so short and straight that I see to its futile end from whatever point I stand, without the need of treading it."

Thus he abandoned untried his scheme of conquest. The atom-disrupter, that had risen in his mind as a world-shaking weapon, sank again to the oblivion of an experiment that was finished. Colossal things died in the conceiving, like an untold infinity of potential human genius.

There remained nothing. Was every avenue forever barred? Must he struggle to the end against the old futility that hemmed him, like one who battles a fog that closes about his blows?

"One road is still untried, though I am by nature ill-fitted to travel it—

"Happiness through pleasure. The

satisfaction of the senses. This presupposes the incidence of sex on my experience, and the pursuit of beauty. I find myself not reluctant."

He rose and mounted the slope toward his car, a grotesque anachronism as he toiled upward, a being born out of his time.

"Paul must serve me here," he reflected moodily. "He shall procure me a woman."

CHAPTER XIII

The 'Seed Planted

"LISTEN to me a minute, Vanny!" Paul was expostulating. "I'm serious. You've got to answer me."

Vanny stopped humming, turned her pert features toward him.

"All right. The answer is maybe."

Paul stared at her a moment on the verge of anger, gave a gesture of exasperation, and strode to the window. Her laugh followed him. For a moment he stared down at the street, where a bat whirled and circled the solitary arc light trying, no doubt, to look like a dragon. Paul spun about, faced the smiling girl.

"You're certainly expert at the fine art of torture," he said. Vanny wrinkled her nose at him, toying with the great black Persian cat beside her.

"Listen to him, Eblis! He's accusing your mistress." She turned back to Paul. "I've been studying Torquemado."

"You could teach him a few tricks!"

"Don't growl at me, Honey. All I'm suggesting is the use of a little intelligence."

"Bah! What's the matter with me, Vanny? God knows I love you, and sometimes you seem to care for me. Why won't you marry me?"

"I thought we agreed last time to

drop the discussion."

"But why won't you?"

She cast him another impish smile.

"Said then the little maid,

You have very little said

To induce a little maid for to wed, wed,
wed.

So pray say a little more,

Or produce a little ore,

'Ere I'll make a little print in your bed,
bed, bed!"

"Vanny, you're impossible!"

"But I mean it, Paul. Two of us can't live comfortably on what I've got, and your contribution would hardly suffice."

Paul dropped to the davenport beside her, startling Eblis into an ebony flash to the floor.

"I guess you're right," he said, dropping his face to his hands. A tinge of sympathy passed over the girl's face; she placed a hand on her companion's shoulder, touched his light hair.

"Snap out of it, Honey," she said. "All's not lost save honor."

Paul sat erect. "Very well, but I'm giving you fair warning, Vanny—this isn't going on much longer! I'll have you somehow."

She dropped her shining black head to his shoulder. "You have my permission to try—try as hard as ever you can, Paul."

FOR a time they were silent. Paul slipped his arm about her, drew her closer, but he still brooded, morose and unhappy. Best start a new train of thought, reflected Vanny.

"How's the night-work, Paul?"

"I'm through with it."

"Fired?"

"No; I quit. Couldn't stand it."

"Why not?"

"Something's wrong with that fellow,

Vanny—something's very wrong. Either he's crazy, or—I don't know, but there's something unnatural about him. His snaky hands and all."

"I used to think his hands were lovely, at school."

Paul did not answer. He was still sullen; something weighed heavily on him. Vanny looked at him with a tinge of pity.

"What's really the matter with you, Paul?"

"Nothing I can tell."

"Don't be silly. I'm no prude, and I have the average gift of understanding."

"It sounds foolish, Vanny—but I'm afraid of that fellow Edmond Hall."

"For Pete's sake, why? You could crack him like a nut!"

"Well, the other night—that's when I quit—he wanted me to bring him here!"

Vanny stared at Paul's distressed face, broke into a peal of laughter.

"He wouldn't be the first freak you've dragged around, Honey!"

"All right," said Paul, again sullen. "You would have it, and there it is."

"But still, what's the trouble? Why not bring him over some evening? You're not jealous in advance, are you?"

"Yes! I am!"

Vanny laughed again, with a taunt in her eyes.

"Not in the way you think," said Paul.

"Of course not." She was still teasing.

"Oh, I don't think you'd ever fall for him! He's too devoid of sex appeal."

"Then what?"

"I don't know," said Paul, "except that I feel he's an ill-omened bird. He's got a raven soul, and it croaks behind his every mood."

"Baa!" said Vanny. "You get tiresome. Your soul's an old woman soul,

and doesn't take second honors anywhere in croaking."

She cast off his arm, rose, and pirouetted before him, ending in a curtsy.

"Come on, Paul. Switch on the radio, and let's dance."

"I don't feel like dancing."

Vanny crossed the room, spun the glowing dial. A dance orchestra swelled into melodious syncopation. She danced over to Paul, seized his hand and pulled him reluctantly erect, drawing herself into his arms as they swayed into the rhythm of the music.

"Paul"—she threw back her head to look up at him—"why *don't* you bring him over?"

"Never!"

"You don't have to be jealous, Honey. I'd just like to meet him again."

"You never will through me!"

"Well, you needn't snap at me so!"

"If you want to see him, call him up yourself!"

"It would be a bit presumptuous, hardly having seen him for ten years—not since high school days." They swayed easily to the music. "However—perhaps I will!"

CHAPTER XIV

The Seed Sprouts

EDMOND felt no more anger at Paul's defection than he felt at the rain or wind or force of gravity, or any other natural circumstance. Indeed, he had anticipated it, perceiving in Paul's nature the emotional seeds from which the refusal sprang. Still, a quality in his own nature, either the goad of ennui or a certain grim persistence led him to maintain Vanny as his objective. His usual merciless scrutiny of his own motives led him to a realization that a certain preference lay behind his persistence; this girl offered a rather rare

aesthetic appeal that drew him more, perhaps, than he had contemplated.

"I weave nets to entrap myself," he reflected, answering at the same moment in another part of his mind, "Surely I am strong enough to break any snare of my own creating."

Thus he set about the task of rebuilding an acquaintanceship of his past. He wished to arrange an apparently casual meeting, confiding thereafter in designs of his own, and he was content for the present to trust to chance to provide the encounter.

For several mornings he drove his car along Sheridan Road, past Vanny's accustomed bus-stop, but failed to meet her. Once he fancied he glimpsed her entering a lumbering bus several blocks ahead of him. He did not pursue; the chance seeming of the meeting would have been destroyed—a subtlety he preferred to preserve.

In his complex mentalities he reflected, "Paul has beyond doubt informed this girl of my suggestion; let her vanity be a little flattered by my interest, and then a little piqued by my lack of it. This at least will give our ultimate encounter a spice of attention." Thus he reflected, and afterwards parked his car on a side street; spending the better part of the day watching a school of minnows that sported through the lagoon in Lincoln Park. He thought idly of many things, amusing himself for a time trying to imagine a feat impossible to perform in the world of the Material.

"All things are possible," he concluded, "given time and a price, and the greater the span of time, the smaller is the price required—and this in effect is but saying that in eternity whatever can happen must happen. Flammarion glimpsed this truth, but his specious theory of past eternity and future is obviously fallacious."

THE meeting was not entirely unexpected by Vanny. She sat at a table in Kelsey's Venice, with Walter Nussman. The orchestra, ensconced in its gondola, drifted silent in the fifteen-foot pool. Vanny was a little flushed, her black eyes a trifle brighter than usual; she had already taken four highballs from Walter's rather capacious flask. Walter was becoming a bit solicitous; indeed, Vanny seldom indulged very freely, yet here she was sipping her fifth, and the evening still young.

"Why don't you quit worrying about Paul, Vanny? He'll be around as usual!"

"Listen, Grandpa! My worries are my personal property! For your information, I'm *not* worrying anyway."

"What's the trouble between you? As your elder, I always thought you two made such an attractive couple."

"We had a spat—and besides, I won't be coupled with anybody! I'm a trust-buster!"

"Huh?"

"He was acting in restraint of trade, and I'm the Sherman Law. *Verstehen* Sie?"

"You're pickled," said Walter, with a judicial air. "You're soused, pie-eyed, blotto, besotted!"

Something in his remark seemed deliciously funny to the girl; she laughed unrestrainedly.

"Why I am not! I'm as sober as you are!"

"My God!" said Walter. "Then we'd better leave at once!"

Vanny raised her glass as the orchestra emitted a blare of introductory chords. Walter seized the opportunity.

"Put it down and let's dance."

"Sure," said Vanny. "You just whirl me around. That's as good as a drink."

They moved on toward the floor, joining the throng already swinging into the time of the music. Vanny was just

a shade unsteady.

"Put some pep into it!" she complained; but the sedate Walter danced as he always danced, marking time as if the staccato blues were a Teutonic march. After a while Vanny succeeded in losing herself in the music; she hummed the piece to herself—the perennial St. Louis Blues—and achieved the sensation of drifting bodiless on a gently undulating sea. She closed her eyes. Walter's methodical steps required no effort to follow; all her consciousness flowed into the single sensation of rhythmic movement. She was dizzily content; there was a faint realization of the forgetting of something unpleasant. Paul! That was it. Well, let him do the remembering; she was well enough able to get along.

The undulations seemed to be lengthening, rising to a peak, and then a long downward slide. Not nearly so pleasant. Better open her eyes—so. The room was swaying a little; she forced her eyes to focus more sharply, and gazed without any surprise into the eyes of Edmond Hall. She flashed him a smile of recognition; he responded. Alone at a table; did he always come to these places just to sit and drink?

"There's Edmond Hall," she said.

WALTER spun her around and gazed over her shoulder.

"The cat-eyed gent sitting alone? Is he the electrical inventor?"

"You don't have to spin me around so! I don't like it."

"I had to write a Sunday feature about his radio tube," said Walter. "Wrote it without an interview, too; he was in Europe. There's something deep about it. Half the authorities I called on said the thing didn't exist, and the rest said it was a fake. Finally got a little information out of this fellow Alfred Stein at Northwestern." He

chuckled. "The paper's still getting peevish letters from professional cranks!"

The music stopped. They joined the general exit from the floor. Seated again, Vanny toyed with the remains of her highball. It was nearly flat, she added a little ginger ale.

"I went to school with him," she said.

"With whom? Oh—Edmond Hall."

"He's funny, but not as bad as Paul makes out."

"Can't prove anything by me," said Walter. "Didn't we see him once before—at Spangli's?"

"Yes. Paul was working for him then."

She sipped the amber-fired glass before her.

"Listen, Walter. He likes me."

"How do you know?"

"I'm telling you. You're my father confessor. That's what started Paul and me quarreling. That's why Paul quit his job. Hall wanted to come over. And I said I'd ask him."

"I never saw you at the confidential stage before! You'll be crying on my shoulder next."

"I'm all right. I'm going to ask him over to our table."

"That's your privilege, my dear."

Vanny turned; Edmond was still regarding her with cold amber eyes. She smiled and beckoned, and the other answered, rising.

"Walter Nussman," said Edmond, at the introduction. "Do you write for the Sun-Bulletin?"

"Guilty as charged," Walter laughed. "You must have seen my feature on your A-tube."

"I did see it. If ever I want to conceal the mechanics of any device of mine, I will surely let you explain it."

"Perhaps the article was a bit inaccurate."

"A trifle so. I believe you did have

my name correct."

"Now I wonder how that happened! I'll speak to the proof-reader."

"Say, you two!" put in Vanny. "I'm being overwhelmed! Such mutual admiration!" She turned to Edmond. "Won't you sit down? I thought you looked lonesome."

"Thank you," said Edmond, meanwhile reflecting, "Paul has been playing my game, else I should have been compelled to make my own opening."

"I'm thirsty," announced Vanny. "Walter, mix me a drink."

Walter inverted his flask.

"Empty, my dear—and lucky for you that it is!"

"I have some," said Edmond, producing his flask. He was unobtrusively watching Vanny; she was still in control of herself, he perceived, though not with her usual cool self-assurance. "Her conscious self is relaxing," he observed. "Paul has forewarned her; let me use the means at hand to pierce this resistance." He permitted the girl to pour her own drink, while Walter grumbled.

"Don't say I didn't warn you! You'll suffer the consequences yourself."

"Listen to me, Old Man! Have I ever disgraced you? Have I?" she insisted.

"I guess not."

"Well! And I'm all right—a little dizzy, but perfectly all right!"

SHE raised her glass. A feeling of recklessness swept into her; she did not note that Edmond's eyes were fixed on her. "Wheel!" she said, and drained the contents. "How do you like that, Ancient?" she taunted Walter.

"About as well as you will in another half-hour!"

"Quit croaking! This isn't an inquest, and you're not the coroner. I came here for a pleasant evening, and

that's what I'm going to have!"

Edmond's flask still lay on the table. Suddenly Vanny snatched it, opened it, and raised it to her lips. Walter seized it, jerking it away with a trickle of tea-colored spots spreading down the crimson silk front of her dress. Someone laughed at an adjoining table. She wiped her lips with a napkin, dabbing at the spotted silk.

"Boor!" she snapped. But somehow the last swallow hadn't tasted right; the floor was gyrating too precariously. "I didn't want any more anyway," she finished.

Edmond stoppered his flask and removed it. "This is sufficient," he thought, and turned his mind to the furtherance of his designs. Vanny's control was at low ebb, and he fixed his eyes on her with a certain compulsion in his gaze; there was something he wished to impress on her mind, something he wanted her to say. She swayed in her chair, shifting her gaze as if to avoid some disturbing sight.

"I want to dance!" she said.

"Better not," said Walter. "We'd better be leaving."

Edmond was peering at the girl, apparently estimating her condition; Walter's near-sighted vision failed to note the intensity of the lambent eyes.

"She's all right for the present," he said. "I'll dance with you, Vanny if I may."

They rose, and Edmond led her to the crowded floor. She moved erectly and steadily enough, but with an effort. They swung into the moving huddle of couples. Edmond danced for the first time in his life, but observation served him, or perhaps his partner was in too uncritical a condition to judge. They moved smoothly, however, and Edmond kept his curious eyes on Vanny's, gazing coldly persistently into hers with some unspoken command. The girl

leaned more heavily on his arm.

"I want to sit down!" she said finally; he half-supported her across the floor to their table. She sank into her chair and dropped her face into her hands, while Walter watched with a look of consternation.

"My God, don't pass out here!" he exclaimed.

She looked up at him. "I want to say something," she said.

SHE felt, suddenly, a sense of foreboding. Decidedly, the world as expressed in her immediate surroundings did not seem nearly as pleasant as it had some minutes before. That last highball had been a mistake, as well as the fiery draught of straight whiskey. Walter was speaking to her; his words didn't register clearly in the blur of sensations. She was trying to formulate something, a thought that seemed trying to emerge by itself from a whirling turmoil of dizziness.

"Listen, both of you," she said, "while I'm still on deck. Tomorrow's Sunday, isn't it?"

"Certainly is," agreed Walter.

"Well, I want both of you to come over in the afternoon. About four. Paul's coming, I think. Both of you—especially you, Edmond Hall!"

She dropped her face to her hands again.

"It's hot in here. I want to get out."

There was a muddle of words about her. Walter—"No, we came in a taxi." And Edmond's voice: "I have my car." She did not see the triumphant gleam in his amber eyes as he took her arm to assist her. Walter stood at her left. Her last clear memory of the place was of a full-length mirror in the hall; she glimpsed herself very pallid, but the strangeness of the memory was of Edmond; he seemed to duplicate himself, so that he supported her from both

sides. She stood between two twin Edmonds and Walter's reflection did not appear.

CHAPTER XV

The Plant Flowers

EBLIS stalked into the room, spat indignantly at Walter for daring to occupy his accustomed chair, and leaped to Vanny's lap. She caressed his black velvet fur with her hand, stretched out her pajamaed legs.

"Was I very awful?" she asked ruefully.

"Never saw anyone worse."

"I'm terribly ashamed. I only wanted to get a little happy."

"You succeeded. Remember the ride home?"

"Not very much. It was in Edmond's car." She thought a moment. "We stopped somewhere, didn't we?"

"Yeah. Several times. Once in Lincoln Park for your benefit, and once in front of his house. Say, speaking of that, how do you feel today?"

"Not bad at all. I've felt worse with less cause. Why?"

"Well, he gave you something. Don't you remember?"

"Omit the questions. I'm doing the listening."

"Well, he went into his house and got something, and I sort of supported you while he persuaded you to drink it. Said it'd ease off the after effects."

"It must have."

"Whatever the dope was, it laid you out like a black-jack. I was a little worried, but he said he'd studied medicine."

Vanny reflected. "I believe he did."

"Well, then he drove us here with you peacefully out on my shoulder, and between us we got you upstairs."

"And left, I hope, like good boys."

Walter grinned. "We held an inquest, and I was the coroner and you the corpus delicti."

Vanny flushed. "I remember the remark, but you don't have to rub it in."

Walter relented. "We didn't do much after delivering you to the proper address. I was all for waiting around but he said the stuff would keep you quiet for five or six hours, and you'd come out of it fairly O. K. So—we parked you right there on the davenport and left."

Vanny gave another rueful smile. "That's where I woke up this morning—in a black and red dress that had seen its last party. I liked that dress"—she sighed—"and all I could think of was my invitation to you and Edmond to come over today. I remembered that perfectly. Think he'll come?"

"Why not? It's the gentlemanly thing to inquire as to your state of health." Walter paused. "Incidentally I came early, so that if you'd reconsidered—we could always leave, you know. Plead forgetfulness. I thought it might be a trifle unpleasant for you if Paul and he were present together."

"Thoughtful of you, at that," she said. "Of course I'm not sure Paul's coming since our spat—that's just a hunch. It's been a habit of his to drop in for a cold snack Sunday evening. Besides, I've a hankering to see Edmond when I'm sober; my impressions of last night are not of the clearest." She was remembering mainly the strange double image of the hall mirror. Do inebriates literally see double? And why twin images of Edmond at the expense of Walter's reflection?

"The choice is yours, Dark Princess," Walter was replying.

"We'll stay, then," Vanny decided.

THE bell rang. Walter rose to answer; glanced down the apartment

hall. He shrugged, and stole a glance at Vanny. "Paul" his lips formed silently. She spread her hands in a quizzical gesture of resignation, and Paul entered. He was patently not over pleased to see Walter and greeted Vanny with, "I'd hoped to find you alone."

"I was just on the point of leaving," put in Walter, seating himself and ostentatiously packing his pipe. Paul glared at him as he lit up and puffed complacently, but Vanny flashed him a smile of gratitude; she would thoroughly appreciate his restraining presence should Edmond appear.

"Never mind, Honey," she soothed teasingly. "With your temper it's just as well to have the presence of a solid citizen like Walter."

"Sometimes my outbursts are justified!"

"All right, Everett True!" She turned to Walter. "Make some conversation, Ancient."

"I can tell you what a rotten business feature writing is: Or any kind of writing, for that matter!"

"It's not a business," said Paul gloomily. "It's not profitable enough to be called a means of livelihood."

"Then why'd you decide to try to become a writer?"

Paul ignored the implied slur. "As master Tristram Shandy says, 'I would not be a lawyer and live by men's quarrels, or a doctor and live by their misfortunes, so'—he spread his hands—"I became a writer"—"

"And live by their stupidity," said Edmond Hall in the doorway. In the startled silence the mantel clock chimed four, beating in dirge-like tempo to Walter's murmured, "My God, I left the door open!"

"You did," agreed Edmond, as the three stared at him. Paul's vindictive glare left him unmoved. He nodded

coolly and inclusively to the two men, and turned to Vanny.

"I anticipated your recovery," he said. "I am glad to find myself justified."

Vanny sensed the question forming on Paul's lips, and felt a flush of embarrassment suffusing her face.

"Thank you," she said, and cast about for some means of forestalling Paul's question. Walter was nonplussed for the moment; Edmond's reference in Paul's presence to the debacle of the previous evening had surprised him. Edmond himself broke the momentary silence.

"I stopped by for just a minute or two," he said. "However, I should be honored to have you accompany me to dinner tonight."

Vanny felt Paul's gaze upon her. She formulated a polite refusal, and heard with genuine surprise the sound of her voice in answer, "I shall be delighted, Edmond."

"Thank you," he said. "I'll call for you at six-thirty."

He moved toward the door.

"Wait, Hall, I'm leaving too," said Walter suddenly. He felt his duty done with Edmond's departure, and had no stomach for the scene he saw foreshadowed in Paul's face.

AS THE door closed, Paul turned to Vanny. His stormy eyes surveyed her.

"Well!" he said.

"Let's have it," said the girl.

"What's that about your recovery? Recovery from what?"

"I'll tell you! I was soused last night."

"You—soused?"

"Well, pickled, then! I don't care what you call it."

"Vanny! You?"

"No one else! I didn't enjoy it. I

passed out."

"But why?"

"You ought to know! I was just trying to forget our scrap. I was only trying to be happy for a little while!"

"Who was there?"

"Walter took me to the Venice. Edmond was there alone and he came and sat with us."

"Walter!" groaned Paul disconsolately, somewhat to Vanny's surprise. She had expected Edmond to furnish most of the fuel to his anger.

"What's wrong with Walter? He'll never say anything."

"That fat Philistine! I know he won't say anything! He'll be quiet simply as a favor! He just loves to do favors—the greaseball!"

"Well, no one'll know!"

"He'll know, and I'll know! He'll think I ought to be grateful because he's being a gentleman! He'll think he's in our confidence!"

"Oh my Lord!" said Vanny, a little relieved at the turn Paul's anger was taking. "I don't think that's such a vital point."

"All right! What about this dinner date with that fellow Hall? Why'd you accept that?"

"I don't know," said Vanny, wondering why she had. "I guess I was just mad at you. Our last fight was over him."

"You don't care much for my feelings!"

"You know I do, Paul!"

"Do you mean you won't go? You'll break the date?"

"No, I don't mean that," said Vanny, shaking her glistening black head. "I've got to keep the date."

"You're going with him?" Paul was almost incredulous. She nodded.

"Bah!" said Paul. He turned and slammed his way out of the door. Vanny watched him go with dark tear-

ful eyes, and turned to bury her face in the deep fur of Eblis who still purred in the corner of the davenport. The great cat felt a touch of moisture; he drew back indignantly and leaped to the floor. Vanny flashed the animal a somber little smile: "Heaven knows you were well named, Eblis."

CHAPTER XVI

Jupiter and Leda

FOR some reason which she did not analyze, Vanny dressed with considerable care for her dinner with Edmond. With no idea of the type of restaurant he contemplated, she selected a severely tailored costume of wine velvet, with a collar as ebon as her hair, and after some consideration, violated the fashion by choosing sheer black hose and tiny black pumps. Edmond's prompt arrival found her ready.

The strange amber eyes surveyed her, and she fancied they had a gleam of admiration. Indeed, Edmond, deep lover of all beauty, found her not at all displeasing, but his cool mentality, pursuing its inevitable probing, searched out the reason Vanny had ignored.

"She previsions the conflict imminent between us, and arrays herself to sustain her own self-confidence. She uses her beauty not as weapon but as armor."

But aloud he merely greeted her.

"Where are we going?" asked the girl.

"Have you any preference?"

"None at all."

"Then let me take you to a place which will perhaps be novel."

Vanny was quiet and a little ill at ease on the drive toward town. She felt constrained and embarrassed, the usual topics of conversation seemed thoroughly futile—the "What-have-

you-been-doing's" and "How-have-you-been's" of former schoolmates. The phantom of Paul's anger, too, rode between them and conversation was restrained to simple generalities.

Edmond drove to a section strange to her, well westward from the Loop, and led her into a plain little second floor restaurant with no more than a dozen tables covered with red-checked cloths. She glanced around curiously.

"Oh—Russian!"

She recognized a giant samovar, symbol to America of things Slavic. Two nondescript men held each a curious stringed instrument in the far corner—balalaikas, she concluded.

"Muscovite," answered Edmond.

They chose a table in a deserted corner—easily enough, for only two other tables were occupied. Vanny was charmed by the appearance of a bearded waiter, and amazed when Edmond addressed him in throaty Slavic. She was charmed again by the cuisine, delighted with the appearance as appetizer of apparently unbroken eggs that proved to contain a paste of caviar, a little startled by the borscht, and once more delighted by a curiously creamy, extremely rich pudding.

"Why, this is a gem of a place!"

She suddenly realized with what enjoyment she had eaten; she had not dared taste food during the day. With the cigarettes came a sensation of normalcy; she felt quite herself again. She resumed her usual self-assurance, and Paul's difficult temperament ceased to weigh upon her. She felt again her cool mastery of self and situation, and turned her attention to her strange companion. He sat regarding her with a half-smile.

"If I've made a pig of myself, the blame is yours for so perfect a choice of restaurants!"

"I hoped you would enjoy it."

Vanny pressed out her cigarette.

"Shall we leave?"

"At your pleasure. Have you the evening free?"

"Of course. My Sunday evenings have usually been reserved for Paul, but he knows of our date."

"Shall we try a theatre?"

"No," said Vanny. "I'm sick of purchased amusement. Let's steal ours. Let's ride. We haven't really talked yet, you know."

THEY drove northward through the cool autumnal air. The lake flashed, and a purple night-veil gave back the stars like an echo. Vanny turned to her companion.

"Why were you anxious to meet me?"

"Because you offer a certain beauty for which I have been seeking."

She laughed. The compliment placed her on familiar ground; she felt as easily able to manage this being at her side as Walter, or fierce, sweet, lovable Paul, who always came back apologetic and dejected. Would he tease as easily?

"Well, that's the first glimmer!"

"Of what?"

"Of deviltry. Frankly, Edmond, while you've been a pleasant companion so far this evening, you've not been quite the fiend I've heard."

"And while you're as lovely at close range as I believed, you've not proved the nymphomaniac women are supposed to be."

"That's a little better!" the girl teased, "but a bit too personal! Besides, I've been called cold before. I like the reputation."

Edmond turned his eyes from the road, looking for a moment into hers. "Perhaps the name is less warranted than you like to think."

For a short moment, when her eyes

met the strange ones of her companion, Vanny felt a little thrill that was almost fear. Instantly it passed, but a stray chill breeze from the lake seemed to rise. She shivered.

"Now I'm really cold," she said.

"Shall we stop somewhere?"

She considered a moment. "I know! Let's stop at the apartment. We can talk there, and no one's likely to come on Sunday."

The agile car swung around, driving toward Sheridan and its banks of mountainous dwellings. They entered, and Edmond recalling the position of the furniture from the preceding night, switched on a single rosy lamp. For a moment they gazed from the window on the distant flow of traffic.

"I always thrill to this," said Vanny. "Life centers in cities."

"Civilization," said Edmond. "City-building. The word is its own definition."

Vanny seated herself on the davenport. The great Eblis bounded into the room; she stretched out her foot to toy with him, then noting the direction of Edmond's gaze, withdrew it, smoothing her skirt in some embarrassment.

"The lady has a prudish streak," thought Edmond. "I shall take pleasure in violating this inhibition." But aloud he continued the conversation. "This colossus called Chicago, and all of its species, is the outgrowth of power and its application. The cycle is self-perpetuating—great cities demand abundant power, cheap energy favors the expansion of cities."

"Paul was describing the city of the future to me not long ago," said Vanny. "Not like this, but a clean and beautiful place. He thinks large cities will die out."

"Being Paul, he is probably wrong," said Edmond. "The future is never explicable in terms of the past, no more

than is the tree in terms of its seed. The elements, the germs, are there but the fruition is a thing apart." He was studying the girl as he had Paul, probing her mind and the subtle relations that are called character. Two evenings in her company gave him data; the conflict approached as he prepared to further his designs.

"Shall I describe the City of the Future, its glory and its horror?" he continued.

"If you think you're qualified," smiled his companion.

"Let us see," said Edmond with a curiously sardonic smile.

He began to speak in a low monody that droned in Vanny's ears like a murmur of distant waters. Gradually the sense of the words grew vague; the sounds of them merged into a continuity, but the pictures they evoked lived on, grew into a sort of reality. She wondered momentarily at this phenomenon, then lost herself in the magic imagery; it did not occur to her that she was being lulled into a quasi-hypnotic state.

"IT IS hot—sultry, on the ground level. Above us is no sky, but the span of the first tier, the swift stage of the delivery level, and the first level of Palace Avenue. This is the city Urbs, planet-capital, greatest of the world cities of that future era, and here buried in the depths of her steel entrails, lies the forgotten ground that bears her. We hear the muffled roar of traffic above us, the voice of that great Street and the hiss of liquid-air coolers sighs from the walls beside us.

"You turn to me. 'It has been a year since last I have had occasion to walk on the ground.'

"A great freight-bearer rumbles past, forcing us close to the walls. We walk on, since it is your fancy to walk, past

masses of blank masonry, windowless but with many doors that gobble freight. Here in the dimness of the ground level the air of Urbs is foul with the breath of her thirty-five millions. Even the almost negligible costume of the day feels hot and moist about our bodies; you sweep back your black hair from your forehead with a gesture of petulance.

"And yet I love it!" you murmur. "This is the city Urbs!" And indeed there is a sort of splendor about the thing, even in its drum-beat voice echoing its vastness to the depths wherein we plod. There is a shouting behind us, and a crowd surges for a few seconds across the street. We watch for a moment, then move on; there is always rioting on the ground level, but a shade of trouble shows in your eyes.

"Ahead glows the red sign of the doorway of the Atlas Building, above a little stone-arched portal; for the great gates of the public ways are far above us. We seat ourselves in a lift for the ten-minute ride to Mile-high Gardens, half-a-thousand stories above the ground. The windows drop past, instant glimpses of the tiers that rise along the great Avenue, a moment's flash of a sky serrated by mist-capped towers, interlaced by the spider-web of the monorail. Then open sky and the cloud traffic of the city Urbs, and we step out into the sun and music and coolness of the Gardens. It is the hour of luncheon; the tables are well occupied. There comes a sudden burst of applause as we appear, for you are Evanne, called the Black Flame."

VANNY turned dark dreamy eyes on the narrator. "But part of the applause is for you, Edmond. Tell me why." Edmond smiled his saturnine smile; he perceived that his designs were succeeding, for it mattered little

what story he told if only it seemed real to his listener, so that his twin minds could insinuate his appointed thoughts. So he continued.

"*WE SEAT* ourselves, and a waiter brings the wines. A performer is singing—your song, Vanny, 'The Black Flame'—in queer, clipped Urban English. But we stare down the teeming length of that mighty Street to its far end, where the twin spires of the Palace rise even to our eyes. There is the dwelling of him called in Urbs the Master, and in the outer nations, the Overlord.

"'An hour—only an hour more,' you say. 'Must you leave again so very soon?' and I answer, 'There is revolution in Africa, and revolt in China. The structure of the Empire grows top-heavy like its City; some one must dance about on top to balance its teetering.' We stare again at the Palace spires, symbol of the Master loved in Urbs, world-hated."

Edmond, who until this moment had no more than taken his companion's arm, now drew her closer, until the glistening black head lay unresisting on his shoulder and his arms encircled her. He droned on his story.

"The quarter hour strikes, and the great fans at our end of the Street spin into a sudden blur, sucking out the fetid accumulations of the past minutes. The city Urbs is breathing, four gasps to the hour. But this is of no import; what both of us watch with bitter smiles is the sinking of an airship between the twin spires of the Palace. It is my Sky-rat, and we know the hour of parting impends. I move my chair close beside yours, the better to embrace you, as is the custom among the rulers of the city Urbs. There is wistful sweetness in the tips you yield; parting grows less bearable."

EDMOND now pressed his thin lips to Vanny's half parted ones; still dream-like she answered his caress, drawing herself closer. Suddenly she stirred, drew back. "Edmond," she whispered, "you are the Master!"

"Yes," said Edmond in solemn tones, "I am the Master!"

The trance-like slumber dropped away from Vanny's mind, yet she still lay quiescent in his arms. A pleasant languor still held her; she was somehow intensely happy, and somehow contentedly helpless. Her will had been given to Edmond; she felt her old mastery of self and situation slipping from her like outworn armor, and was content. And then both mastery and contentment slipped away indeed!

How, she did not know; but as Edmond drew her erect, her wine-colored velvet dress dropped away in sudden revelation. A feeling of horror and impending violation pervaded her, yet the strange lassitude held. She could not resist, and only with stricken eyes pleaded with her tormentor to withhold from his purpose. For that which she had decried in others was overtaking her, and she was utterly helpless to forestall disaster.

But Edmond too was experiencing a revulsion of different sort. He had satisfied his self-given promise to violate Vanny's modesty; the thrill of her half-revealed body was highly pleasing to his senses, but another element appeared—the foreign emotion of pity. He felt the appeal of the girl's fright-

ened eyes and quivering form, and found himself neither as cold nor as ruthless as he had hitherto believed.

"This is a needless cruelty," he thought. "Let me give her some means of self-justification."

He drew her close. "You love me, Vanny."

A straw to grasp at. "Oh, yes! Yes!"

"You are very beautiful, dear. Dance for me, Vanny!"

Strangely, without Vanny's being aware of it, the radio was providing a soft melody. Edmond drew back, seated himself, while Vanny half-huddled before him.

"I must justify her costume to herself," he thought.

"Dance for me, *Black Flame!*"

Vanny swayed, took a few faltering steps while Edmond watched the flash of light on her black-silk clad limbs. Suddenly she crouched sobbing, with her arms across her face. Edmond sprang to her, raised her in his arms, and bore her to the davenport. Still holding her, he thought, "Something lacks. I have not yet justified her complaisance to herself." He considered a plan. "After all, why not? The form means nothing at all to me, and she is really a very lovely creature."

He bent over Vanny's head. "When will you marry me, dear?"

She stirred, looked up at him with tear-bright and serious eyes.

"I have said I loved you, Edmond. Anytime! Now, if you wish it!"

To be concluded next month.

ICE AGE CAVE-MEN

SCIENTISTS, tracing human occupation of North America back into the Ice Age, more than 25,000 years ago, now report evidence that earliest Americans who reached New Mexico were cave men and hunters, knew how to build fires, apparently wore clothes, and probably cooked their food.

The results of five seasons of digging into Sandia Cave, New Mexico, where modes of

Sandia Man's ancient style of living are revealed shows traces of housekeeping buried far beneath debris left by Folsom Man. That the earliest known people of this continent made clothing is inferred by finding Sandia Man's snub-nosed scrapers, the kind of instrument that Europe's Old Stone Age people, such as the Cro-Magnards, used to scrape animal skins for garment making.

THE FLYING WING

By MORRIS J. STEELE

The present design of the airplane does not permit maximum efficiency of performance. Elimination of fuselage and tail would help. Hence the Flying Wing.

THE flying wing is not simply an invention of the artist who draws "fantastic" pictures for covers of fiction magazines, but is a practical machine that men have been trying to perfect for almost three decades. And today we are close to the time when the flying wing will be a reality.

The tail and fuselage of a plane are "drags" and reduce the efficiency at least 33 percent if not more as well as the plane's speed. However, the tail has been necessary for control on the plane and the fuselage is a "necessary evil" to hold the tail behind the wing. Some planes have been designed and built in which the tail is attached to the wing with struts instead of a complete fuselage, but they have not attained the complete success of a flying wing.

About the time of the first world war, the first flying wing was built, but the problem of control was unsolved. The only possible place for the control surfaces was at the wing tips which resulted in giving the flying wing a bad spin. In smooth air, this defect was not a handicap, but when the air was rough, the pilot couldn't hold the plane steady.

One of the leaders in the field to develop a flying wing is a man by the name of Jack Northrop. He first built a plane with no fuselage in 1929, but it was not a real flying wing since it possessed a tail group attached to the wing by means of two outriggers. Ten years later Mr. Northrop again took up the possibilities of a flying wing and designed a true wing in collaboration with the research staff at the California Institute of Technology. The models were subjected to many months of exhaustive tests in the wind-tunnels. To get the data accurately, two synchronized motion-picture cameras were used—one that photographed the wing while the other was recording the data on the tunnel instruments concurrently.

One model after another was tried and discarded until a model was finally obtained that possessed the properties Mr. Northrop was seeking in addition to a system of control that would make the wing as stable and easy to maneuver as

an ordinary airplane. The control system still follows the old theory of flaps in the wing tips. After this model passed all tests in the wind tunnel with flying colors, the next important step was to build a flying wing to see whether it could perform under actual flying conditions as well as the model had done in the wind tunnel.

The first wing was twenty-eight feet in overall length with a large sweepback and powered by two sixty-horsepower engines. After a few trials the engines were replaced with two air-cooled one-hundred-twenty horsepower motors that are horizontally-opposed. Both engines are hidden in the wing and the wing is driven by pusher-type propellers. For greater speed and efficiency the landing gear is retractable.

There have been many tests made since the first test over a year ago and also several changes in the design. The most important changes were made in the wing tips in an effort to give the wing greatest control. The wing is a success according to the test pilots who have flown it and say that it handles as easy as any airplane.

The wing has many advantages over the ordinary airplane besides its greater efficiency. It is lighter, cheaper, and easier to build, which is important today. The greater efficiency will permit the carrying of the same loads now carried by planes at the same speed with the less outlays of power or by keeping the power the same, the speed can be increased.

In order to carry passengers, the wing would be built seven or eight feet thick. It would hold the crew, passengers, cargo, motors and other mechanism. To enable the passengers to enjoy the scenery, the front edge would be transparent in addition to floor panels. Hatches in the wing would make the loading and removal of cargo a simple matter.

To take advantage of the fact that a few propellers are more efficient than a large number of propellers, plans are being drafted to "hitch" up a number of motors to one propeller for greater speed and power. So don't be too surprised if a flying wing passes overhead very soon—for they are soon to come—and stay.

Phantom Transport

By LEROY YERXA

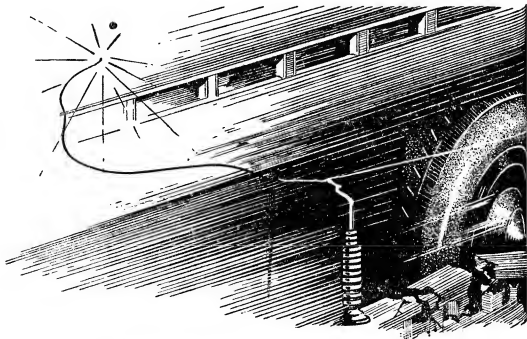
EIGHT hundred miles east of the roaring Pacific coast line a gigantic test truck careened up a slow grade on the Trans-World Highway. The enormous solid body of the truck bounced easily between humming lines of shock proof tires. High in the air above the forward wheels two grim faced men hunched over the controls.

"Arrow" Lawson, tall, almost awkward, held the wheel. His face was gaunt and tired from the long hours in

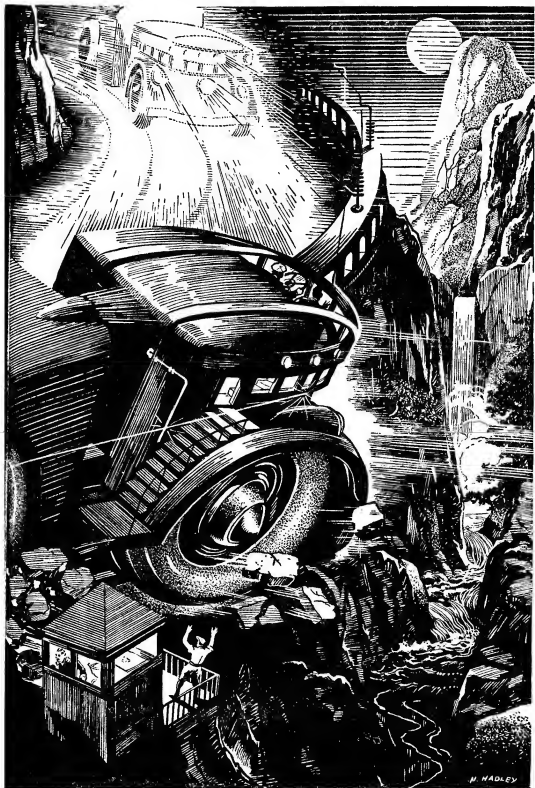
the tight cab. This was the biggest job he had ever tackled. Lawson didn't intend to fail the assignment.

"She's smooth, all right." His eyes never left the glowing plastic that stretched ahead of them. "If we can hold her together for two hours more, we'll have the greatest thing ever conceived in ground transportation."

"Grumpy" Walters, wrinkled dual man, pushed his crash helmet back nervously and scratched the thin fringe of



IT was death to ride on Scraghorn mountain—death dealt out by a phantom monster roaring down the super highway



Arrow wrenched the wheel around desperately; the huge truck plunged down . . .

white hair that circled his shining scalp.

"If we *don't* succeed we'll be out of a job and the World Peace Union may as well fold up its tent and scam. This Japanese business is getting plenty ugly."

Lawson was silent. "Test One" started to climb toward the dark outline of Scraghorn Mountain. The sound of mighty diesel engines filled the cab, drifting up from the engine room at the rear of the truck. Arrow glanced at his companion. Grumpy was deep in thought. In spite of the calm, double-chinned face Grumpy Walters had worries tonight.

Lawson admired the old warrior. He knew those quiet eyes could flash fire when high stakes were in the game. Grumpy could handle the wheel of the test job as though it were a scooter. The little pot-bellied man moved with deadly speed and precision at the controls. Walters was made of first class steel to the core, in spite of his gruff talk and everlasting cud of chewing tobacco.

The plastic highway climbed swiftly now. Realizing he might be needed, Walters switched on his controls and both men guided "Test One" toward grim Scraghorn.

The sky, dark now for some hours, held an odd red overcast of atomic fog. Lawson checked the dash carefully and entered the data on a small note book strapped to his knee. A strange far-away sound drifted into the cab and his forehead wrinkled into a worried frown. The speedometer shot a tiny spear of light slowly around until it stopped at 800 m.p.h.

"It's hard to believe that the peace of the world might depend on us tonight," Arrow said slowly.

GRUMPY WALTERS pressed the window release open and spat into the night.

"With this damned atomic storm raging," he said in a matter of fact voice, "the ability of the Peace Union to deliver goods around the world depends on this one highway, and transports that are big and fast enough to cover ground in a hurry."

His head bent forward suddenly and tipped to one side, listening. Arrow cut the motors. They could both hear it now.

"Damned if I ain't hearing things!" the older man said. "Could have sworn there was a truck coming up the grade from the west."

Then realizing he must be wrong, he continued:

"With our air fleet grounded for six months, the Japs are stirring up more trouble in the Far East than we can handle. If we hadn't hit on the idea of extending Translucent Trans-World Highway* across both oceans we'd already be dead pigeons."

High above them against the abrupt cliffs of Scraghorn, a beam of light lifted from the surface of the plastic and flashed through the air.

"There *is* a truck up there," Arrow's long fingers jerked out "five" and "six" motor releases and the last two diesels roared to life. Almost without realizing it he drew the wheel around gently until they were hugging the outer side of the highway. The power lights of the oncoming truck swept over the crest of the hill and blinded him.

Steady . . .

The truck howled down the grade toward them—hogging the center of the plastic.

Scraghorn had a nasty reputation. Truckers were refusing to take this run. They had told foolish hair-raising stories about a ghost truck.

Half a mile away now—the other

* For a complete explanation of this super highway, see "Death Rides At Night"—Amazing Stories for August, 1942.—Ed.

truck had switched sides on the highway and was headed straight toward "Test One."

Lawson looked quickly at Grumpy's grim face. Walters' chin jutted out, the cud of "chewin" forgotten. Beads of sweat stood on his face.

"I don't like the looks of it." His lips moved stiffly. "The highway police were supposed to keep Trans-World open for us."

The strange transport was almost upon them. To the right of the plastic, steep unbroken walls of granite swept up out of sight into the red cloud bank. Lawson knew from past trips that the cliff to the left dropped beyond the retaining wall into a valley two miles below.

He slapped the power switch off and climbed down hard on the brakes. Too late. The onrushing truck seemed to expand as it came against them. Headlights splashed into great white circles of light against his face. Twisting the wheel with all his strength he felt "Test One" break open under his feet. A terrific force struck them broadside crushing in the mono-steel walls. Tires screamed wildly as they careened into the high wall at the edge of the highway. It broke their speed some. The transport that had hit them seemed to dissolve silently into the night.

He heard Walters groan and speak in a faraway voice.

"The Phantom Transport!"

His voice was terror stricken.

The wall crushed out under the savage impact of "Test One." The truck rolled away from the cliff edge and toppled end over end into the chasm. Arrow felt his arms torn from the wheel and almost ripped from their sockets.

The world was a revolving mass of twisting screaming steel. He felt his body suddenly released from pain and knew he bounced around the cab like a

lifeless puppet. He closed his eyes and wondered why death was so easy. It didn't seem to hurt at—all. . . .

* * *

THE spacious council room of the World Peace Union was overflowing with important men. The Union had spent a fortune on Warren Masters and his transport factories. Under a blue cloud of sulky cigar smoke they watched history being made on the tela-screen map against the far wall.

In the three short years since Masters had come from his study of the Far East, he had acquired the important post as Master General of West Station. Now the atomic storm threat was an ugly thing that promised ultimate destruction to the peoples of earth. Masters found himself the center of attention.

Since morning the small line of light on the map had plowed steadily ahead. Warren Masters was jubilant. His thin almost expressionless face delicately indicated the man's growing importance. Sitting in a heavy leather chair drawn close to the map, he puffed quickly at a long Havana.

The slender gracefully attired body had full control of this situation.

When Arrow Lawson jerked the test transport against the wall on Scraghorn and sent it hurtling into space, the line on the tela-screen map twisted abruptly and went blank.

Masters jumped to his feet. The cigar dropped from limp fingers into the deep rug. He moved swiftly and silently toward the screen.

Tall, willowy General Briggs of East Station followed, lighting a cigarette from the one still in his lips.

Yo Sen, High Commissary from Chungking Station lifted his aged body from a low chair and followed them. The remainder of the group stayed at the table. Some of them dropped ex-

hausted heads to its smooth top.

Masters crouched over the screen and switched the contact lever around. He brought in the image of the dispatch room on the floor below. A loud hum of excited voices drifted up to him from the bank of tela-screen senders on the floor under the council chamber. Joyce Walters, Chief Dispatcher was in the foreground of the screen.

The girl was lovely at any time. Now, with tears welling into the large brown eyes, her beauty was startling. Masters stared at the full wet lips, noted the white teeth clenched down hard on one of them.

"The map!" he almost shouted. "What has happened?"

Her teeth clamped down harder, high forehead wrinkling. Joyce pushed a strand of honey-colored hair back under the earphones. She was frightened more than a professional attitude should have allowed.

"I—I don't know, sir. We seem to have lost contact." She released the lip from her teeth and a tiny bloodless line showed the depth of her emotion. "We maintained contact with Grumpy—I mean—Mr. Walters until five minutes ago. Then the screen blanked and we haven't—been—able . . ." She started to sob and switched the screen blank in his face.

MASTERS straightened with mixed emotions in his heart. The girl was Grumpy Walters' daughter. If anything happened to the old man . . .

The high cheek bones of his face seemed to lengthen in pain. His eyes narrowed and he pulled a tight collar from his throat, breathing hard.

Usually trim and neat during a crisis, Masters let himself go to pieces under the strain.

He chewed at the tip of a fresh Havana and strode swiftly back and

forth across the wide room. The men watched him closely—waiting. Briggs waited until the caged tiger look left Warren Masters' eyes. Then he approached and guided him to a chair.

"Please sit down, sir!"

Masters slumped forward with head on his hands.

"It's useless," he groaned. "Something terrible has happened. My entire project is ruined. Our people will suffer . . ."

"We must plan for eventualities." It was Yo Sen, the Chinese leader. "Fate has struck us its first blow."

Masters turned on him in anger.

"Eventualities be hanged. Without these new trucks and their speed we can't hope to cope with this problem. God pity every decent soul on earth if we don't distribute supplies. The Japanese are ready now to strike us in the back."

"I realize your heart has been broken," Yo Sen answered gently. "You have done your best."

Warren Masters softened, an apology on his lips.

"Forgive me," he muttered in a low voice. "I've tried. God knows how hard I've tried."

Briggs interrupted.

"It's not your fault, sir. But even you can understand that we cannot approve of your production plans on these transports when even the first test truck has proven itself a failure."

A murmur of assenting voices arose from the group around the table.

Masters nodded.

"I've lost," he admitted. "But the world has lost vastly more than I. Twenty factories ready to start immediate production. They will lie idle and our people will die."

* * *

THE Dispatch room below was alive with special reporters and intelli-

gence officers. There was a bedlam of noise.

Joyce Walters felt herself going slowly mad. The transparent earphones held the long hair out of her face. She tried to reach the truck once more, but the earphones were dead.

"Calling 'Test One' — 'Test One' come in *please* . . ."

No answer from the void. Her arms dropped. Tears flooded her cheeks and she brushed them away with a smooth hand. Then the small shoulders under the business suit stiffened. This was no time for a cry. Grumpy would want his daughter to play the game straight through to the finish.

Red lips snapped into a straight line and a flush of high color spread across her creamy cheeks. Somewhere out there in the night was the best old warrior any girl had ever called "Dad." She didn't know Arrow Lawson well, but a queer lump filled her throat every time she thought of the tall driver's honest, lovable face.

There had been introductions at the terminal yesterday. Grumpy had brought Lawson across the apron of the truck field and pushed him forward with a heavy blow on the back.

"Joyce—meet Arrow Lawson—best damned truck cowboy that ever yanked a wheel over the divide. He's taking the test run with me."

Lawson had mumbled something in a low, pleased voice and blushed. It was a fine tribute to her beauty.

Now Joyce was aware of the silence that had settled down on the dispatch room. The girls under her command were removing their head phones. Reporters streamed out with their stories of the lost "Test One." She looked around wildly and wanted to shout for them to go on trying.

Warren Masters was at the door. He came in slowly with arms hanging

dejectedly at his side. His shoulders were hunched forward.

If the Master General of West Station had given up . . . ? She tried to speak but her voice caught in her throat. The room grew suddenly very tiny and hot. The bank of tela-screens in front of her seemed to twist and melt away before her eyes. She tried to stand up—saw Masters come toward her with his face deeply concerned.

"Miss Walters?"

The room turned black and a rainbow of terrible colors flashed inside her head. His arm was around her waist. It seemed so foolish to—faint—now . . .

A small faraway voice said insistently.

"Bring some water quickly."

* * *

IN ARROW LAWSON'S head a powerful motor roared in protest. Lights that flashed up a long road blinded him. He clutched at an aching head to hold them away. Opening his eyes Arrow realized the light came from a gleam of sunlight cutting through the cab's broken window.

Then he was still alive? Staring up at the roof of the twisted metal box, he let his mind wander back lazily to the crash on the highway. The terrible ride over the cliff edge. What about Grumpy?

He sat upright and pain shot through his leg. With a groan he sank partly back, looking around him.

Walters was against the far side of the cab, his face twisted with pain. A slab of mono-steel had ripped from the cab door and pinned him there.

"We ain't in Heaven," Grumpy forced a grin through the blood that covered his lips. "I've been waiting for you to come around for a long time and I'm sure it ain't."

Lawson moved the stiff leg and knew it wasn't broken. He sighed with relief.

"Maybe not," he said. "But if we came through this mess alive, it's good enough for me."

Grumpy lifted a blood-soaked arm and wiped his face.

"Well Mr. Lawson," he clenched his teeth, "if you can navigate, give me a hand will you?"

Walters was game and he was badly hurt. Arrow started to crawl toward him, felt the twisted body of the cab lurch under him. He stopped, then moved forward inch by inch. Carefully he gripped the steel trap that held Grumpy's body and released him from under it.

"When we rolled over the cliff top, I figured the next stop would be the ground floor."

"It's obvious that we didn't have an express elevator," Grumpy snorted. "Must have hung up halfway down."

He rolled from under the steel slab. With his undertunic, Lawson skillfully bound his companion's wound.

Crawling carefully through the shattered window the truck cowboy dropped to solid ground. His lips puckered in a low whistle.

"Give me a lift," Walters said. "I'm coming out."

They were on a narrow ledge of granite not two hundred feet from the top of the canyon wall.

Only the cab had lodged here. The remainder of "Test One" had ripped loose and fallen to the canyon floor far below.

Arrow walked to the edge and stared down. Almost out of sight below the smooth belly of granite he could make out the remains of the transport. It spread out over the valley floor hardly visible to the eye. Grumpy came slowly to his side.

"Feel better?" Arrow asked.

"When I see what might have happened to me and didn't, I feel great."

LAWSON drew out a crushed cigarette package and extracted a last smoke. Breaking it in half he pushed one end into Grumpy's mouth. He tossed the empty pack on the rocky floor. His gaze traveled upward, searching for an explanation of how they had hit the cliff shelf. Grumpy's eyes followed his own.

Twenty feet above their heads a gnarled, sturdy pine tree twisted away from the rock wall. Dangling from its branches were long steel cables that had torn loose from the truck. Arrow shook his head slowly.

"The cab must have broken from the trailer and hit that pine," he said thoughtfully. "The cables swung in onto this shelf and we stayed put."

"I always said it would take a lot to kill me," Grumpy sat down weakly. "But I thought I was on Gabriel's calling list this trip."

The sun climbed slowly against the far side of the canyon. They must have been in the cab all night. Lawson thought of the anxious Peace Union waiting for news of their trip. He wondered how Joyce, Grumpy's kid, had taken their failure to show up at West Station. Perhaps she'd think of him some, also. Then his mouth twisted into a desperate, almost frightened expression.

"We're safe enough here," he said. "But how in hell are we going up or down?"

Walters spat the remainder of the cigarette from his dry lips and watched it drift out of sight below.

"Never thought of that," he admitted. "No rope ladders—no wings, so I guess we stay here."

That damned nagging fear of high places was pulling at Lawson again. This was worse than the early trips aloft in the highway patrol's Sky Bugs. At least he could come down in them,

whenever he wanted to.

He turned his back on the sickening drop of the cliff and walked toward the gradually sloping roof of the cave. Grumpy followed and sat down with his back against the wrecked cab.

"You need a doctor," Lawson said.

Walters grinned weakly.

"Fat chance," he answered. "They wouldn't be much good by the time one of them dropped this far."

A strong wind whipped through the narrow canyon and Arrow's face wrinkled thoughtfully. The forgotten cigarette package lifted from the floor and blew into the darkness behind the shelf.

There must be an opening to create an inward draft against the side of the mountain.

Eagerly he ran toward the back of the cave, staggered over a pile of debris and pitched headlong. A cold wind rushed over his head and into a small shaft cut from solid rock. He reached out for something that might help him arise. His fingers closed over rough wood. Lighting a match he grinned delightedly at an ancient pick-axe, rusted and rotten with age. The tunnel was man made and could never have been started from the cliff side of the mountain. There must be another entrance above.

RETURNING, he found Grumpy still leaning against the cab with his eyes closed tightly. Blood was seeping through the chest bandage. Arrow bent over him and lifted the older man gently to his shoulder. Grunting under Walters' weight he went toward the new-found tunnel. If he could get out in time, Arrow thought, it would be the closest Grumpy had ever come to the Heaven he had mentioned.

"Think you found something?" Walters asked suddenly.

Arrow was silent. Grumpy tried to

slip to his feet.

"No you don't!"

"I feel like a weak-kneed old grandma," Grumpy protested.

"And I feel like a pack horse. It's the only way out."

He reached the tunnel and plunged into the darkness. Fifty feet from the entrance the chipped walls narrowed down to less than three feet in diameter.

"Guess we'll have to crawl from here on." He let his load down easily. "Take it easy, fella."

"About time," Grumpy mumbled. He wriggled along ahead of the lanky Arrow. The tunnel climbed swiftly and grew smaller as it went. Finally Walters stopped. His head thudded against solid rock. He swore loudly in the dark.

"Finish," he said shortly. "This is the end of the damned thing."

Lawson lighted a match. The old man was right. They had stumbled into a small chamber barely four feet across. He tried to stand up and to his surprise the roof lifted above his head. He stretched carefully and helped Grumpy to his feet.

"Looks like the bottom of the well."

Above them the light of his last match flared high, its yellow light flickering against the void. It faded and went out, but not before Lawson saw the row of rusted spikes driven ladder-like up the smooth wall above.

Walters knew what he was thinking.

"Sorry," he grunted. "It's your show from here on. I couldn't climb a horse."

Arrow had studied the spacing of the spike ladder carefully. Now the match was out he was almost sure that a tiny crack of light sifted down from above. He picked Grumpy up, held his arms around his shoulders and strapped them tightly with his belt.

"Hold everything, Gabriel," Walters moaned. "We're on our way up the golden stairs."

ARROW started to climb slowly. Pressing his body tightly to the wall he felt the rusted, sharp-edged spike cut his palms. The limp weight of the man on his back told him Walters had fainted. The spikes came up under his reaching hands one by one. Sweat beaded from his face. The muscles of his arms were red hot and twisting under the terrific strain. Then he reached for a hold that was not there. A smooth round hole met his finger tips. He must be fifty feet from the chamber below.

He looked down and thanked God that it was dark. The old dizziness wasn't so bad this way. Still the old fears rushed into his brain and the fingers of his right hand started to slip. He looked up and with widened eyes saw the crack of light broaden slowly. A flash of color crossed it and then paused.

Under Arrow's foot one spike crumbled from the wall and fell. He held on tightly with both hands and felt Walters' body sway with his. The spike hit the floor far below with a loud clang.

Above him the circular plank cover twisted up from the shaft's top and rolled to one side. The light flashed down on his face and a feminine voice called softly.

"Hold tightly—just a minute."

He looked up and tried to grin. A long rope snaked out and tightened around his waist. Lawson's breath sucked in tensely and his fingers stiffened. The spike slipped from his cramped hold and gave away under the weight of their two bodies. He knew the rope was tightening and prayed that it would hold. Then they fell and the breath ripped out of his tortured lungs.

* * *

JOYCE WALTERS awakened in the small sick ward opposite the dispatch room. She was dizzy and heart-sick. Sitting up, she realized it was late

at night. She started to dress quickly and took a deep gulp of cold water from the glass on the bed table. Tossing the heavy mass of blonde hair from her face, she powdered the dark circles from under tired brown eyes.

What should she do now? They had given up all hope of finding her father and Arrow Lawson alive. Yet it wasn't possible that they were really dead. You just couldn't kill men as good as her father and the young truck driver. They were too tough to kill—too good. A lump arose in her throat and she forced the tears back.

Lying against the pillow her eyes stared up at the white clean ceiling. She must do something—anything to keep from going crazy.

Something about the name of Scraghorn Mountain sent cold shivers playing up her smooth back. The drivers had been talking about the ghost truck for weeks.

"Wouldn't take that Scraghorn run for a million," one of them had said at the terminal only the other night. "Damned ghost truck can have *that* stretch of road all to itself."

Joyce's chin jutted out in cool determination. Someone would pay dearly for every hair that was harmed on Grumpy's white halo.

The corridor outside was dark. She walked along its silent length toward the elevator shaft. A tiny green light burned over the dispatch room door.

Joyce hesitated. That light burned only when a tela-screen was left open. She went toward it. Just outside the room she stopped quickly and drew into the shadows beside the polarized glass front. Inside the thick glass the figure of a man stood before one of the "outlaw" screens.

The "outlaw" wave lengths were for the use of high officials only. What message was so important tonight that

it had to be transmitted secretly?

It was none of her business. Yet, only a few of Masters' highest cronies had keys to the dispatch room door. Masters? She studied the dark outline against the dimmed screen. Yes—it was he.

But it was the face on the screen that covered her body with gooseflesh. The face to which Masters was talking was like yellowed parchment with slitted eyes as black as burned steel. She knew at once that Warren Masters was talking to a Japanese.

STIFFENING, Joyce drew closer to the concealing wall and tried to hear what the mumbling voices were saying. "The project has been destroyed; what about International Station?" his voice came faintly through the glass wall. The Japanese face remained expressionless, but thin lips moved in reply.

She felt like a fool. Masters had his spies in all parts of the world. This Japanese was undoubtedly one of them. It was logical that they should report on a wave length that would remain undetected.

She turned and went slowly toward the escalator. Safely on the floor below she rang for the express car and dropped ninety floors to the main entrance of the government building.

Jeff, her favorite newsboy, held out the evening paper as she passed. Joyce gave him her small change and tucked the paper under her arm without looking at it. She walked uncertainly along the plastic and stopped at the curb.

For the first time Joyce was completely bewildered. With no one at home to greet her, the trip seemed unbearable.

Warren Masters was leaving the building now. She watched him idly, admiring the Master General for tak-

ing his defeat so nobly.

Masters purchased a paper and waited at the curb for a rocket cab, unaware of her presence. He glanced at the front page and laughed audibly. Heavy headlines were spread halfway down its surface.

Curiosity overcame Joyce. She unfolded the paper under her arm and stared at it with slowly reddening face. The headline read:

**JAPS CAPTURE INTER-
NATIONAL STATION
Tank Forces Speeding Toward
Our Coast**

Flaming anger spread over her face. Liquid eyes froze into pools of ice.

Masters had been talking to a Jap. This news which should have shocked him, was pleasing to him.

Somehow, she decided in that instant, Warren Masters was also responsible for the loss of the test transport. Responsible for any fate that may have overtaken her father. It was utterly fantastic that the Master General of West Station would wreck his own industries—his own trucks. It was just as amazing that Masters should talk to the Jap on the tela-screen. Yet he had laughed aloud at headlines that foretold the probable downfall of his own country.

A brilliantly colored rocket cab flashed up and Masters got in. Joyce knew exactly what she must do. Waving an impatient hand she hailed another cab from across the broad avenue of light. The driver gunned his little job and roared around in a U-turn to her side. He pushed the door open and she jumped in.

"Follow that last cab that left—" Masters was already a mile away on the plastic avenue—"There's a bonus for you if you don't lose him."

The tail of the cab flashed fire and they shot forward at sixty. The freckled cabby grinned over his shoulder.

"I'll run him off the road if *you* say so, Miss."

JOYCE held her breath. Masters' cab headed for the foothills of fashionable Outer City. In five minutes they were among the tiny drives that covered his great estate. Her driver stopped at a corner well hidden by an undergrowth of shrubbery.

She got out and passed him three times the normal fare. He doffed a jaunty cap and smiled.

"The other mug pulled up just around the corner," he said blushing. "If you need any help with the gentleman friend, just give me a short scream."

Joyce blushed guiltily.

"I won't need you, thanks."

"That's good enough for me, lady." He slammed the door and roared away down the silent road.

In front of the low, stucco house Joyce hesitated again. A single light burned in a window far back from the road. Taking a deep breath she walked firmly along the twisting path. The moon threw its shadows through the trees and across the dark lawn.

A high cluster of bushes thrust themselves toward the walk. She went in among them, heard footsteps behind her and halted. Pivoting, Joyce clutched her throat to hold down a scream of fear. Masters stood close to her, a cynical teasing grin on his face.

"I thought I heard a cab pull away," he said. "Nice of you to stop in."

His eyes were narrowed and something in them sucked all the strength out of her.

"I—I was just leaving . . ."

"Oh," he said. "But you just got here. I know. I've been watching you.

Miss Walters—you're a very lovely girl to be going about at night unprotected."

"Please, Mr. Masters," she begged. "I'm nearly crazy with what has happened. Can't you help me?"

"Help?" Masters chuckled grimly. "So you came to me for help?"

She clutched at the straw.

"Oh yes!" she said quickly. "What did you think?"

His eyes glinted in the moonlight.

"Of course you could use help," he said slowly. "But the help you are begging for will have to come from a different source."

His arm swept around her waist and a wet, stinging cloth held in the scream that tried to burst from her lips. She twisted strongly in his grasp and felt the powerful odor of ether cutting into her nostrils. An odd, sleepy sensation thrust itself over her limbs and she sank down limply. She felt wet grass against her cheek and tried to struggle up. Sleep overcame her taut muscles.

MASTERS looked quickly toward the road. He picked her up roughly and walked toward the garage at the rear of the house. Inside the large plastic-car he dumped the girl on the back cushion and closed the door.

In five minutes he was talking by tela-screen to an incredibly lovely oriental girl.

"My Loa See has been patient in staying alone so long," there was a sneering overtone in his voice. "The Master compliments her and feels sorry for her loneliness. He will be at Scraghorn Mountain in two hours."

He flipped the control of the screen off and grinned in satanic glee at his own cleverness.

Shortly, a bright light cut across the lawn from a small studio atop Warren Masters' home. Up into the sky on

"outlaw" bands went a message to the Japanese High Command at the recently occupied city of International Station.* A message that sent thousands of ponderous land tanks thundering out across the link of Translucent Trans-World Highway toward the unprotected coastline of West Station.

Warren Masters, with Joyce firmly trussed up in the rear seat, started driving a few minutes later. The plastic-car headed away from the glowing western metropolis, toward the black, forboding walls of Scraghorn Mountain.

* * *

A FAINT faraway gong sounded through thick walls. Arrow Lawson opened his eyes and for the second time in twenty-four hours, wondered how he had escaped death. He sat up slowly and felt thick, soft cushions spread out under him. This room *might* be Heaven. He would never question it.

Stretching carefully, he felt rested. Discovering the soft blue pajamas that covered his lanky body, his face grew as red as a school boy's who gets washed and tucked into his bed.

* When Translucent Trans-World Highway was extended around the globe, it became necessary to build rest and refueling stations at several points.

As far back as 1940, artists were dabbling with their paint and producing dream cities floating in mid-ocean. These drawings never left the dream stage until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

With sailing ships all but forgotten, the floating cities still presented a sound plan for the advancement of transportation. Trans-World Stations were constructed at the three already mentioned points on Americana.

Later—Continental Station on the northern boundary of ancient Spain—and Chungking Station in the Chinese city of the same name, came into being.

With the gyroscopically stabilized pontoon reaching its rightful place in the scheme of living, the great city of International Station came to life in the Pacific. It was located on the International Date-Line. Hence its name.

At the time Masters flashed his message to the High Command, International Station was in the hands of the Japanese war lords.—Ed.

The small cell-like room wasn't over eight feet square. Looking for the source of the bright light that had awakened him, he decided it came from the millions of tiny openings in the walls. Indirect lighting such as he had never seen before.

The place was barren except for the vari-colored pillows under his back. There were dozens of them. A woman's touch he decided and blushed again, wondering what she had done with his ragged, filthy riding togs.

The gong sounded again, closer, as though to warn him of someone's approach.

With a rush of emotion Arrow remembered the shaft. The sickening sensation that rushed over him as they fell. Grumpy! Where was he?

He stood up quickly and went to the blank wall. The deep scar around his waist where the rope had cut, was sore and irritating.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Open up—will you?"

His voice bounced around the four walls and the place was silent again. He tried again.

"Let me out," in a mock pleading voice, "I'll be good."

A very soft, sweet voice drifted in over a hidden speaker.

"You must be quiet. You are safe until the others find you. I'll release you if you promise to do as I say."

It must be the girl who had drawn them from the shaft. The "others," whoever they might be, would have kept her from saving him.

"All right." His voice was more quiet. "I'll do just as you say."

A NARROW section of the wall slipped open and he stood at the end of a long hallway.

Standing a few feet from him, her head tipped up slightly to his, was the

prettiest oriental girl Lawson had ever seen. She might be Japanese or Chinese. He couldn't decide which. The small smiling face was as creamy and smooth as white ivory. He stared hypnotized into the deep set black eyes that were like ebony swamp water. Arrow was more embarrassed than ever at his own gangly form hidden under the blue pajamas.

The girl took a step toward him and he thought her head bowed to him ever so slightly. The hair—great black coils of it were wrapped in shining rolls atop her perfect head.

"I—I want to thank you for using that rope," he said. "I'm not so good with words—but—well, I value my useless life and after today I owe it to you."

This time she did bow. Her head went low and came up gracefully with the dark eyes staring into his own.

"Simple compliments are always sincere," her voice tinkled pleasantly. "And now if you will follow me?"

She turned abruptly and walked away from him toward the far end of the hall. The brilliant crimson kimono swept against the alluring body, accentuating every lithesome curve. Her feet were hidden entirely by the flowing length of the red gown.

"Your friend is safe and cared for," she was reading his thoughts. "I will take you to him. You must both leave here at once."

"Tell me about this place," he urged. "What's all the mystery about?"

She turned slightly, a finger held to her lips.

"My name is Loa See. This cliff house is home. I am not here by my own choice." She frowned. "More than that I cannot tell you, except for one thing. You are in danger of your life as long as you remain within these walls."

They reached an open archway, leading into a large, richly furnished lounge. High torch-like lamps threw light from each of its corners, softening the pale blue walls and giving the scattered chairs a comfortable and important look. This seemed from its size to be a council chamber of some kind. But for whom? Scraghorn, Lawson decided, had only given up a part of its secret.

Loa See was still a few paces in front of him, her hips swinging gracefully as she walked. Then across the room in sharp outline against the wall, the shadow of a man spread out. The shadow held an upraised weapon. Lawson grasped the girl and drew her back swiftly. Not a minute too soon.

A line of flame shot across the place where she had stood. The shadow stayed there, motionless—waiting.

Crouching against the wall, Arrow whispered softly. He held his lips close to her ear.

"So you have enemies also?"

LOA SEE'S face was filled with fear. He squeezed her hand reassuringly, and pushed her behind him. Two more shadows joined the first. He knew from the outline of the stiff service caps that they were soldiers. Ignorant ones, if he could judge by the manner in which they displayed themselves to the revealing light.

They were advancing slowly from his right, waiting to turn the guns wide open if he showed himself. Taking a long chance Lawson stepped into their range and then leaped back again quickly.

"*Sputtt . . .*"

The gun spit fire across the archway, burning a section of the wall at his elbow. Arrow faked a deep groan and fell forward, his body hitting the carpet with a thud. He hoped it had been

a convincing act.

The men ran forward, guns ready. They stood over him, prodding his ribs with heavy boots. He didn't move.

The Jap who had fired at Loa See suddenly pushed his weapon into the holster and knelt down on the carpet. He rolled Lawson to his back.

Arrow tensed his muscles and sprang. In a lightning motion he jerked the gun away from the bewildered Jap and kicked him hard in the stomach. The man fell backward with a grunt of pain.

Lawson swept the gun around at one of the armed men and sent a searing flame into his chest. The weapon went hot in his fingers and the man slumped forward silently.

Lawson was behind the closest chair, hidden from the two who were left. This was a tough game. He knew the chair offered no protection from their guns.

Dragging himself along the silent carpet he rolled swiftly behind a new position. A flame ripped out and the smell of burned cloth told him a second later would have meant cremation.

His gun sent its death sting flaring toward the man who had fired. The Jap's arm dropped off at the elbow and his weapon rolled on the floor. The armless soldier squirmed in pain and fell behind the protection of a long couch.

Changing his position again quickly, Arrow waited for the third Jap. The soldier had taken refuge in the corridor. Lawson waited, sitting on his haunches. He looked down at his torn, scorched pajamas and smiled ruefully.

When you shoot a rabbit — don't chase it—sit still and wait.

He crouched silently. The place was silent except for the armless Jap who kept moaning from behind the sofa. Then a closely-shaven head moved out from the corner of the hall. Slant eyes

studied the room. Arrow didn't have the heart to shoot him in cold blood.

He jumped to his feet and shouted.

"Hey! Let 'er fly."

The Jap came on the run, his face blank with rage. Arrow tripped the trigger back gently and the Jap took the shot of flame between his small eyes. The force of his onslaught carried him into the room, and he pitched forward at full length at Lawson's feet. He didn't move again.

"**A**ROW!" The cry came from the direction of his cell. Grumpy Walters and Loa See were running toward him. Walters had a long knife in his hands. He was ready to tackle the whole Jap army single-handed.

Arrow waited, hiding himself as best he could from the anxious eyes of the pair.

"Hello, Walters." He waved a hand toward the men on the floor. "Put away your toad stabber. I'm all cleaned up."

Grumpy started to chuckle.

"Look at yourself," he said. "You need some personal cleaning up."

Arrow felt his face growing hot. He looked toward the girl. Loa See was deeply impressed by the results of his fight with the Japs.

"You are strange men," she said and her eyes twinkled bewitchingly. "How can you speak lightly when death is so close?"

Grumpy put his fatherly arm around her shoulders.

"You're the best joker in *this* pack," he reminded her. "Now that we are all asking questions, why did you pull us out that hole in the floor?"

She didn't have time to answer. A rush of sound drifted up from a room far below them. A warning bell rang loudly in the great hall. Loa See took Grumpy's arm and silently motioned

for Arrow to follow. They ran back along the hall toward the cell in which he had been locked. She pressed a slippered foot against the hidden spring and the door opened again.

"Inside—quickly." Her voice was taut with fear.

Lawson knew they would have to trust the girl fully. Following Grumpy, he let her close the door behind them.

"Well I'll be damned," Walters snorted. "We sure let that little girl push us around."

Arrow didn't answer. He was walking swiftly around the cell, staying close to the walls.

"I can stand plenty of pushing from her," he said suddenly. "The kid's ace high for my money."

"I'm sure of one thing," Walters sat down on the cushions and scratched his bald dome. "The girl isn't a Jap."

Lawson stopped his pacing and stood very still.

"What makes you say that?"

"Those Japanese are rats, but they stick together like a pack of wolves. She didn't even bat an eye when you killed the three out there in the lounge."

FROM the hidden speaker soft voices were rushing in to them. Before Arrow could catch any words, the sounds faded in a distance. He started to pace again.

"For God's sake stop that caged tiger act," Walters begged. "Take it easy. She'll be able to handle things all right."

"What about the dead soldiers?" Lawson asked tersely. "They're bound to find them."

He stopped walking. A faint *click* came from the wall beside him. Retracing his steps carefully, he tried again. The sound came again and another secret door opened. It was opposite the one they had entered.

Grumpy sprang to his feet.

"You're the damndest guy I ever saw to figure things out." He rubbed his scalp. "I'da sat here until hell froze before I thought of that."

"Guess work," Arrow admitted. "I thought there'd be more than one way out of this place."

They went swiftly along the strange hall. It was smaller than the other and led to a blind alley fifty feet from the cell.

"I been thinking about that truck we hit last night," Grumpy said in a puzzled voice.

"Truck—hell!" Arrow turned with blazing eyes. "That was pure mountain air. The force that pushed us off the road came from some mysterious source. Something that instead of crashing into us head on, just pounded against the side of the truck and pushed it over the cliff."

Walters' jaw dropped.

"Never thought of that." A look of dawning understanding came into his eyes. "If we had hit anything solid at that speed, the test job would have folded up like a two-buck accordion."

"Right," Arrow's eyes were icy. "If I'm on the right track, that ghost truck originates from these cave rooms somewhere."

They reached the end of the wall and he searched carefully for another hidden release. Finding the spring more quickly this time, they watched the door open slowly. Beyond was a great, jagged hole in the face of the cliff.

Lawson's breath sucked in. They stood on a natural shelf overlooking the countryside below Scraghorn Mountain. The valley below spread out like a perfect relief map. The Trans-World Highway, hardly wider than a yardstick, darted like a green arrow from the east and faded away

toward West Station. They stood in awe of the scene, leaning over the three-foot wall that enclosed the cave-like room.

"When I was a kid," Lawson said slowly, "Dad told me some day I'd see three dimensional movies that wouldn't need a screen. Movies that would throw moving, solid looking people into the air and make them act natural."

Grumpy was silent for a long time. This was too tough for his practical mind.

Then he said.

"But Arrow—how in hell . . ."

Lawson groaned.

"Maybe it's a pipe dream," he admitted. "Damned if I know where the magic machine I dreamed up, is hidden."

SOFT footsteps sounded behind them. Arrow pivoted. Warren Masters stood in the open hall with his feet thrust wide apart. A gun waved at them threateningly.

Lawson took one step forward and stopped. His arms went slowly into the air. Grumpy followed his example. The bald-headed old warrior's chin dropped. His eyes studied the weapon and traveled with utter disbelief to Masters' angry face.

"Warren Masters!" his fists clenched. "I'll be a son of a blue-eyed polecat."

Masters expression was like a bitter mask. He stood stiffly erect never taking his eyes from the tall young cowboy.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. This is a pleasure, although very much unexpected. My faithful Loa See failed to mention your presence."

Lawson knew the girl had been faithful to them. His arms went to his sides again, slowly.

"Whoever your Loa See is," he said

evenly, "he knows nothing about us."

Masters seemed to relax.

"I am glad. It might bring unpleasant complications."

Lawson stared at him coldly—without emotion.

"I didn't know the Peace Union allowed mad dogs to run loose."

The man's lips tightened.

"I'd have more respect for this weapon if I were you."

Arrow tried to edge toward the man with a gun. The weapon pushed forward, stopping him in his tracks.

"A snake is brave as long as he has fangs," Lawson snarled. "When they are drawn he'll wriggle under your heel where he belongs."

"Cut the drama, Arrow," Grumpy said shortly. "As long as this rat has his gun he's going to play God. He'll strike at the wrong time, one of these days."

Masters smiled.

"You are a wise man, *Mr. Walters*." He stepped back against the wall of the passage and motioned them to pass. "Should you attempt to escape—your daughter . . ."

Walters whipped around with a snarl.

"If you're hurt Joyce . . .?"

Masters' face whitened. Then the feel of the gun in his hand reassured him.

"Joyce is thus far unharmed. I simply suggest that you do as I say."

"And back it up with a shot in the back if we don't. You *are* a snake, Masters."

Grumpy turned and followed Lawson back toward the cell.

* * *

JOYCE WALTERS sat very quietly with her slim body slumped forward, elbows against bent knees. Her head ached terribly. She must have been in the barren cell for at least two

hours. Masters had brought her to this strange place and she waited now, fearing that at any time he might return for her.

Pushing the tousled mop of hair from her eyes she tried to ease the pain in her head by pressing both fists into her eyeballs. Her gray suit was torn and wrinkled. She knew Masters had brought her here in his car after she had gone to sleep from the ether. She dreaded the outcome of her foolhardy trip to his home.

Faintly on the other side of the wall, a gong sounded. Without knowing why, she stood up and tried to brush some of the wrinkles out of her skirt. A tired blush crossed her cheeks as she noticed the long rip that revealed smooth creamy flesh halfway to her hip. Holding the skirt together as best she could, Joyce tossed her head back proudly and waited.

A door slipped open in the wall. Grumpy Walters stood before her, a pink-tinged bandage around his chest. He was clad in the worst looking, dirtiest blue pajamas she had ever seen. Grumpy whom she had given up for dead, grinning through pale lips.

"Daddy!" Joyce rushed to him with tears of happiness washing down her cheeks. Their arms went around each other and he held her close to him. Then, over his shoulder she saw Lawson.

"Oh!" she said. "I'm—I'm so glad."

Arrow looked worse than her father. His pajamas were burned and filthy, hanging to his long body until he looked like a reluctant scare crow.

"You both look so funny," she giggled a little hysterically.

Masters' sarcastic voice spoiled her happiness.

"A touching scene," he said from behind the men. "But—if I may interrupt?"

"You have a way of interrupting that has become increasingly disgusting." Her eyes flashed and with arms akimbo the girl faced him over the barrel of the gun.

"You are happy to find your father here?" Masters ignored her sarcasm.

She bit her lip, drawing the blood.

"After finding out what a snake you are," she said coolly, "I'm happy to find him alive."

Masters stepped forward quickly and slapped her face with the palm of his hand. Joyce's cheek went crimson under the blow. She didn't flinch.

Arrow Lawson seemed to move only above the waist. Without obvious effort his fist crashed out squarely against Masters' bony chin. The man's head jerked back and he staggered against the wall. His lips curled haughtily.

"Until you did that . . ." he breathed hard, "I had planned to spare you torture. This forces me to plan otherwise."

Joyce's eyes glowed with a look of pride that was ample reward for the lanky truck driver. He thought for a minute that Masters was going to shoot him down in cold blood. The gun didn't frighten him.

Joyce had been glad that he, as well as her father, was alive.

Warren Masters backed slowly from the room, and the wall closed. They were alone, wondering what form of hell he would plan for their benefit.

WHEN the two guards came for Lawson, he knew there wasn't a chance to escape them. Without ceremony the men came into the room. One of them covered Grumpy and Joyce. The other lifted his weapon in the air and without expression on his yellow face brought the weapon down with a crushing blow on Arrow's skull. He knew they were dragging

him by the arms from the cell. He knew that Joyce was screaming and fighting them like a wildcat, saw her pushed roughly back into the cell room. Then he closed his eyes and felt his arms twist and stretch out until they felt like raw branding irons of red hot flesh.

It was very dark and hot about him and he slept fitfully.

"Arrow Lawson . . ."

He groaned and tried to turn away from the sound.

"Arrow Lawson . . ." The voice was soft—pleading. "Please open your eyes."

He became aware of a red-blood fog before his eyes and cool small fingers that brushed it away soothingly. The lump on his head ached fiercely. He groaned and tried to sit up. This time a soft arm crept around his shoulders and helped him. The fog cleared and he was looking into the swamp water that swam blackly in Loa See's eyes.

She crouched beside him on the hard floor. He wanted to throw his arms around her and tell the girl she was the finest thing in the world. This was the way she had come that first time. Soft and so frail looking. Ready to help when he needed her.

"I'm glad . . ." he started to talk and his own voice sent throbbing pains through the back of his head. Closing his eyes again he knew her soft lips brushed his own. She whispered close to his ear, and he understood part of what she said.

"I'm all right. Get hold of myself in a minute."

He looked at her in the dim light of the strange cell room. She was dressed in a filmy tunic of warm blue that swept the floor. The warm perfume of her flesh came through it and she held his head cradled close to her

breast. With a small cloth she wiped the blood from his face.

"Try to stand up," she said, and placed her hands under his armpits. A light of tense purpose was in the girl's eyes. "We must go before the Master awakens."

"The Master?" he looked at her strangely. "Warren Masters?"

She nodded.

"To us he is only a friend who will destroy us all when his work is completed."

Lawson stood up swaying with dizziness. She put the strength of her body under his arm and helped him walk from the room. In one hand she carried a bundle.

"You aren't Japanese?" he said.

Loa See smiled softly.

"To the Master I am of Tokyo blood. To you, I am Loa See, girl who came from nowhere to worship and help you to safety."

She spoke with much more than sincerity in her voice, baring her soul to a man for the first time. Lawson understood.

They went through the hall and she found a strange release to the door half-way toward the lounge room. There was a long, rough-hewn tunnel, like the one Grumpy and he had first entered from the cliff. She drew him quickly from the hall and the door closed behind them. For a time he could see nothing, but followed her along the rough granite. Her tiny hand clasped his fingers tightly.

FAR ahead soft glowing moonlight outlined the outer end of the tunnel. Loa See stopped.

"I cannot go beyond here."

"But I can't leave you," he protested. "If Masters finds out what you've done . . ."

"Go at once." She pushed him from

her. "Here is a bundle. Your clothing and the key to Masters' car are in it."

She tried to draw away from him.

"I'm not a complete heel," he said.

"You want your friends," she answered simply. "They wait for you outside. The car is just north of the tunnel entrance."

"But what will he do to you?"

The girl gave him a little push.

"I have handled Masters before," she said. "But if you will save me punishment, go at once."

"You've been a peach," Lawson said. "I'll be back for you in a few hours."

With a moan she was pressing against him, the fragrance of her waist-long hair in his face. The warmth of her body tightened against his almost savagely. He stood very still in the darkness and with one arm around her waist, tipped her lips to his own.

She returned the embrace with a fury that startled him, released herself and was again out of his reach. He heard her run a few steps back toward the hall they had left. Then she halted and her voice wafted down guardedly.

"The ghost truck has lost its fangs tonight," she said. "But be careful if you return. It will grow them again very soon."

He started to follow her, saw a flash of light as she entered the hall and the tunnel was dark and silent again.

RIPPING the bundle open Lawson found his clothes and donned them quickly. He emerged into the moonlight of the mountain side and felt the key safely in his pocket.

Ahead, against the brush covered cliff were two waiting shadows. He went toward them cautiously and breathed with relief.

"Loa See told me you would be waiting," he said.

Grumpy thumped him soundly on the shoulder.

"Joyce has been all out for defense until you showed up," he chuckled. "Wanted to go back and beard the lion in his den."

Arrow hoped they couldn't see the bright wave of color that still stained his face from his passionate experience in the tunnel.

They found Masters' plastic-car without trouble. Working quietly, Lawson released the brakes. They sped down the rutted mountain road away from the secret mountain hide-out. The moon was bright as Lawson eased the small car swiftly among the dangerously jutting rocks. In five minutes the Trans-World Highway lighted up before them, and he eased speedily into the outer lane.

They'd have to go straight back west and past the spot where the ghost truck had run them down. For the first time since they left the mountain hide-away, Arrow relaxed his grip for a minute and stared at his companion.

"I suppose she told you to wait for me?"

"Right," Grumpy answered, "and I'm darned glad that we're out of that hole. If I get my paws on Masters, I'm going to take a few pounds of his flesh."

Joyce was very quiet. She wondered about the little oriental girl. It was evident that Loa See thought a lot of Arrow. She had risked her life to free him.

Grumpy grew nervous. They were almost opposite the high cliff where the truck had gone over. He chewed hard at his usual cud of tobacco, opened the window and shot a mouthful toward the side of the road.

"I don't like the idea of this," he said. "That damned ghost truck isn't going to miss a chance at us if I'm any judge of this setup."

Arrow smiled softly.

"I don't think we'll worry," he said. "I think the dragon has lost his teeth for the time being."

He was dreaming of Loa See and the way she had clung to him in the cave.

"We'll be back for trouble in a few hours." Under his breath he added 'and a poke on Masters' jaw for every time he lays his dirty hands on the girl.' "

THE road dropped to the straight level of coast country and driving grew easier. He pushed the fuel lever forward and watched the speedometer line flash around to 300 m.p.h. Joyce stared at him queerly. He sat the wheel control for the straightaway and turned to her.

"You've been a peach," he said. "I'm sorry you got mixed up in this."

She shook the soft hair back from her face and grinned at him. Her eyes sparkled.

"I'll never forget the way you punched Masters when he slapped me. It isn't often a man will face death as coolly as that for a girl he hardly knows."

Grumpy interrupted.

"Look, you two," his voice was harsh but the twinkle in his eye betrayed him. "Lawson has two women following him around now. For the time being, I want to know what is happening at West Station."

Joyce realized suddenly that they knew nothing of the impending attack on West Station. They had been completely out of touch with the world.

Rapidly she sketched what had happened to her since the tela-screen at West Station had gone blank. The men

listened intently. Lawson's face was coldly emotionless. Grumpy grew more excited with every word. When she had finished, Lawson sat very quietly, bending forward against the wheel. He started talking, almost to himself.

"It's clear that Masters built the test truck and his factories as a blind. A camouflage for his activities with the Japs."

"Damned expensive camouflage," Grumpy grunted. "But with the whole world in the pot, he could afford to set the stakes high."

Arrow nodded.

"How long can General Richards and his army defend the coast line without reinforcement?" Arrow asked.

Grumpy tipped his head back thoughtfully.

"Not more than twenty-four hours if there's any size to the attacking force."

Arrow whistled softly.

"That won't give me much time, but I think we can make it."

"Make what?" Joyce questioned him eagerly. "Do you have some plan to help him?"

Arrow turned off the mechanical control and took the wheel again. They entered the heavy traffic lanes of West Station, and sped down the plastic boulevard.

"Maybe it's my imagination," he said, "but unless I'm crazy, there's a weapon on Scraghorn Mountain that will turn on its own creators and wipe them from the earth."

Grumpy gasped.

"I'm not sure I know what you're thinking about," he said, "but if it's got anything to do with that phantom transport, it's powerful enough for me."

"Ready to go back with me and take a chance?" Arrow asked.

"Give me a good club and turn me

loose on those Japs. I'll show you how ready I am."

LAWSON drove straight to the high promontory where the Translucent Highway walked stilt-like away from the mainland, and stretched glowingly out across the Pacific. A net of "fire-wire" had been laid across the road. Thousands of strands of it burned white-hot with amperage. The great atom-smashing power station atop West Station Hill was whipping out voltage to sear anyone coming within fifty paces of the stuff.

Stretched across the hillside behind this electric barricade, "Ironsides" Richards, with fifty years of tough army life behind him, had laid out his battle line. The ray cannons, their size controlled by the peace council laws, were pitiful weapons with only enough power to throw death a hundred yards. Lawson realized with an angry twist of his mouth that Masters had enforced these regulations personally.

A sentry stopped the car a half-mile behind the battle line.

"Captain Richards wants no civilians beyond this point," he said. "Sorry, you'll have to turn back."

Then the sentry recognized Grumpy Walters hunched in the back seat and a smile flooded his face.

"Why didn't you say something, Mr. Walters?" His face was red. "The General said if you arrived to show you to his emplacement at once."

In five minutes they were behind the partly buried ray cannon, listening to Hugh Richards tell of the tough spot he was in. The man was a leader from his stiff, bronzed neck to the booted feet that held him erect and proud before them. When Richards talked they became silent, admiring the ringing intensity of his voice.

"And now," he completed his story of his job to have everything in readiness for the attack, "I have three hundred men and a few pitiful weapons to stand off God knows how many of those yellow fiends. Once they cross the bridge head and land, the whole country will go down before them like grass in the wind.

"The voltage fence?" Lawson asked. "That's your main defense, isn't it?"

"Right," Richards shot a glance of admiration at the tall driver. "Once they get the range of the West Hill power station, one shot will blank it from the map. After the wire cools—"

"These pea-shooters of yours won't stop a tank," Lawson finished and stood up.

"What then?" Grumpy asked shortly.

"Well—" Richards' neck turned red. "Dammit, man, you're forcing me to say it—We'll have to blow up the highway."

Joyce's lips parted.

"Oh, no!" she gasped, and then was silent.

RICHARDS looked from one man to the other. His head dropped.

"I know." He said it like a man who had been almost licked and wants to come up for a last round.

"For forty years I've nursed this little army along on what little money I could scrape together. The Union has stopped me at every turn. No money—no weapons—no men.

"Now they are on the spot and so I'm holding the bag. I can't see my own people blasted to hell in front of those super-tanks the Japs are using. Before I'll let them plunge their blunt noses into West Station I'll destroy Trans-World."

Grumpy chewed hard, spat and chewed again.

"I don't blame you," he said. "But once that highway is cut the world has lost its last chance for peace in this century. The world looks to West Station for finished products of all kinds. Without our industries and a way to transport finished materials, the other countries cannot survive."

"Including," Lawson added abruptly, "their ability to stand conquest by the Japs. This will only be the first of their attacks."

Joyce had been listening quietly.

"You told us you had a plan," she reminded him.

Arrow looked at the tense eager faces around him. The men were waiting with an eagerness for anything he might suggest.

"I do have an idea," he said slowly. "It can't be called much of a plan yet."

He climbed the breastwork in front of the gun and stared in the direction of the Pacific. Returning he started to talk swiftly, his mind clear with something he hoped would work.

"Richards, you'll have to keep the Japs away for at least five hours. Whatever you do, don't advance beyond the electric fence. If something doesn't happen to turn the tide of battle in that length of time, why—you'll have to blow the highway."

"But," Richards objected, "I'll have to know what you have in mind."

Arrow looked him squarely in the eye.

"It's so damned fantastic that I'm not even sure myself. Just take my word that I'll be in there pitching with everything I've got, and hope for the best."

The tough old officer shrugged and looked questioningly at Walters.

"Take his word for it, Hugh," Grumpy said shortly. "You haven't anything to lose and the boy's all right."

Richards nodded. He grasped their

hands firmly and said to Grumpy.

"Take care of yourself, Old Timer. We've kicked around a lot in the last twenty years."

"Old Timer, is it?" Grumpy growled. "You ain't no youngster yourself."

Richards turned to Joyce.

"You had better get back to town, young lady. We'll all be pretty busy in the next few hours."

She started to object, then remained silent. There was no time for petty arguments now. They climbed into the car and drove toward West Station.

THE streets were crowded with frightened citizens. Every manner of strange weapon had been dragged from forgotten storerooms. Lawson chuckled dryly when he saw a group of pompous business men armed with the long forgotten Garand rifles, out of action ever since World War II.

Joyce left them at the government building. She climbed from the car and placed a kiss on Grumpy's leathery cheek. Then swiftly her lips met Lawson's and pressed them warmly. The car roared out of sight and she stood alone at the curb. Not for long. A rocket cab zoomed to her side and she climbed in.

"Drive me to the Union Freight Terminal," she ordered. "Don't spare the horse power."

ARROW LAWSON felt right at home behind the shimmying wheel of old Transport Six. He had brought it through with flying colors from the series of mysterious metalode accidents a year ago. It was hard to believe that this rebuilt truck was the same one that had blown to hell under him that night in the highway ditch.

Now with rattles and all, he was happy with Grumpy clinging grimly to the opposite side of the cab. For two

hours they were silent, with their thoughts full of West Station and the impending disaster. Walters watched with keen admiration the way Lawson piloted the old truck.

Arrow's plan was vague to the point of being foolhardy. In the back of his mind he thought he might be able to find and transport the mysterious cannon at Scraghorn to the seashore near West Station.

Forcing his thoughts back to realities, Arrow watched for the almost hidden road that led toward the cliff house. He watched for the ghost transport, praying it would remain invisible this trip.

They reached the hidden road and left the Trans-World. The roaring motors of 'Six' took them forward swiftly and he felt the huge truck body bouncing dangerously between the giant wheels.

A single light burned at a small window on the side of the cliff. Slamming down the powerful brakes he felt the job rock back and forth as the wheels stopped dead.

They were a quarter of a mile from the secret entrance.

Climbing from the truck he went forward swiftly. Walters, with both guns drawn, walked close behind him. From the lighted cliff window a single, piercing scream cut into the night. A low moan followed and he knew the tortured cry came from Loa See's lips.

Good God—the devils were beating her. He rushed forward. They found heavy doors of iron hidden against the cliff. To Lawson's surprise they pushed in easily. Evidently Masters hadn't expected company so soon.

Expecting to face the whole Jap army at any minute, the pair went up a long corridor and into the lounge where Lawson had killed the Japs. The room was deserted.

From a gallery above, the scream

came again, boiling his blood. They found the stairs and went up them three at a time. In the hall above Lawson stopped, breathing hard. Grumpy caught up with him and stood with eyes popping.

The long hall looked as though fires from Hell had purged its walls. At the far end, stacked like red chips, were a full dozen burned and broken cadavers. The men were Jap soldiers, and Arrow had an idea now why Loa See was being punished. Evidently she and Masters were alone here in the cliff house.

If the weapon burned its trail to the far end of the hall, then it must be concealed somewhere behind them. He reeled around and dashed to the other end. Heavy walls stopped him, but he knew what to do. A faint sobbing came from beyond.

Walking toe to heel, he found the secret spring and saw the door swing back.

ARROW gasped at the scene in the room, raised his gun to fire but never pulled the trigger. Masters, his face cold with hate, had been faster. A long black-snake whip curled out and jerked the gun from Lawson's grasp. It clattered on the floor. With his other hand Masters covered them with his own weapon.

"Drop your guns." He re-coiled the whip skillfully. "You're just in time for the show."

But the eyes of the two men were not for Warren Masters at this moment. They looked beyond him at the girl tied by the wrists to a long, high, roof beam. Loa See had been strapped with her toes touching the floor, the kimono dropped loosely to her waist. Across the smooth back and hips blood dripped out of long deep welts in the flesh.

The girl had fainted and with head dropped forward, the long black hair

drifted down to her waist. It partly covered the tear-stained face. She twisted and turned from the force of the lash, her body quivering from the last blow.

Arrow sucked his breath in sharply and the muscles of his hands flexed the long, bloodless fingers.

"Masters," he said in ironic fury, "I'm going to kill you a dozen times for every whip lash you've laid on her body."

"You'll be in no condition to kill anyone," Masters sneered. *"Get down on your knees and tell me you'll hurt no one."*

He raised the whip and brought it down across Lawson's face. Arrow sank down, holding his hands up to protect himself. A shiver of pain crossed his body and he stayed on bended knees.

The whip sang out again, but before it struck, Lawson had judged its speed. With lightning speed he grasped the thongs that were meant for his back.

Masters didn't have a chance. Lawson fell back flat, jerking with all his strength. Before the other man could let go of the handle, he pitched forward on his face and the gun spun from his fingers. Arrow was up, retrieving the whip in quick overhand motions.

Grumpy leaned against the wall, his face split with a grin of ecstasy. He spat brown tobacco juice full in Masters' face as the man came upright. Masters retreated to the wall and crouched, his eyes on the fallen gun. The whip lash shot from Lawson's tough arm and sang out loudly on Masters' face.

With a moan of pain Masters tried to crawl across the floor to the gun. The whip lash came down again across his reaching fingers and he jerked his hand back, nursing it between swollen lips.

"Give me a drag at that whip before

you throw it away," Grumpy said. "I'd like a little blood for myself."

Lawson passed the whip to him.

"Every time you hit him," he said, "remember what he just did to the girl."

Masters stretched full length on the floor.

"Please," he begged. "Not again."

The whip cracked down and he squirmed. Grumpy spat brown juice again as his aim improved.

ARROW went to the girl. He took her tenderly in his arms and drew the kimona around her hot, suffering body. Feeling the bare flesh above her heart, he knew she was still alive.

Grumpy, his arm tired and his soul revenged, helped cut the thongs that bound Loa See. They carried her to the hall and put her down carefully.

Arrow bathed the wounds with water Grumpy found below. Then, lifting her head in his arm, he forced cold water between her lips.

Loa See opened her black eyes and smiled at him.

"It is good that you came back," she said. Smiling wanly she closed them again. He gave her more of the water.

"I feel better now, except for the pain." She put a small arm around his neck and sat up. "Masters? Have you captured him?"

Grumpy motioned toward the room they had just left.

"He'll lie still for a while," he grunted.

"The soldiers?" Arrow asked. "Did you kill them?"

Grumpy interrupted him.

"Richards will blow up the highway in half an hour," he said. "We've got to work fast."

"I'm trying," Arrow silenced him. "Listen, Loa See. You killed those men with the cannon?"

She shuddered.

"Then you know . . . ?" and before he could answer, " . . . it was necessary, to save you."

"Then Masters has got the atom cannon hidden here?"

Her eyes lifted.

"You—know?"

Lawson smiled softly.

"Only part of it," he answered. "I know the phantom transport must be a movie of some kind that can show pictures in the air. I know that a powerful gun is focused to synchronize with the pictures so that it will fire when the ghost truck hits a metal object. You will tell me the rest."

It was Grumpy's turn to protest. His jaw dropped.

"You didn't tell me . . ." he sputtered.

Lawson helped the girl to her feet.

"You've seen everything I have," he told Walters. "I've just been thinking things out."*

Lawson looked at Loa See questioningly.

"Well?"

"Yes—yes." Words poured out eagerly. "I have been here for many months. Masters constructed the atom cannon to prevent his own test truck from working. He also used it to slow

up the transportation of supplies. The Japanese War Lords provided him with funds to insure the success of their war on this country. He has been promised the rule of this land when it is powerless to fight longer."

"That's in ten minutes," Grumpy reminded them wryly. "I think we'll hold this talk until then. Where is this cannon?"

"Come quickly."

LOA SEE held Lawson's arm and they went back toward the room in which she had been tortured. At the door she stopped, her eyes turning questioningly to Walters.

"Masters?"

Grumpy pushed by her and looked around the place. It was empty.

"I'll be damned," he said slowly. "Didn't think that crook would move for a week."

"We've got to find him," Arrow shouted. "Before . . ."

"It's too late!" Loa See's voice was dead—expressionless. Lawson pivoted at her side. The slab of wall had peeled back and they stood before a heavy glass partition. It was diamond hard and more than a foot thick.

Beyond it stood Warren Masters and his atomic cannon. Lawson knew the

* The atomic cannon, although Lawson did not realize its full construction details at the time, was a simple instrument to construct. One question arises. How could the image of a moving truck be projected without a screen? At the present time, complete blueprints exist of a machine that will send pictures three thousand feet into the sky and project clearly against the clouds. This machine proved so satisfactory that several advertisers contracted for its use. It is tied up in the law courts by three interests, all determined that it will not be used.

Three dimensional pictures are simple things. To project them against dust particles and atom dust in the air is feasible. Even more so when we consider the atomic storm that was covering the world at the time Lawson fought Masters and his backing power.

How can the picture be projected without a

telltale beam of light from the projector?

Black Light, to state the case simply, is manufactured in a mercury tube in the same manner as early tubes of the fluorescent type. It is screened through a special glass, and emerges invisible to the human eye.

If projected against a fluorescent object, the light becomes visible within the human spectrum.

As early as 1940, scientists threw movies with Black Light against a fluorescent screen and they appeared clearly at a distance of fifty feet.

The atomic cannon had two barrels. One for the picture. One for firing its projectile of force. They were constructed to work in unison. When the ghost truck of light struck a metal object, it released a shaft of atomic power that struck with uncanny accuracy.

This—then—was the ghost machine of Scraghorn Mountain.—Ed.

man was on the same balcony he and Grumpy had found before. Over his head they could see the long emerald band of the Trans-World Highway.

Masters ignored them as he crouched over the weapon. It was shaped like a huge packing box, constructed of steel and hidden under black paint. Two eight-inch cannon barrels projected from it and pointed down across the valley.

Masters was fumbling hastily with the control board that winked its colored lights from the base of the machine. He sat down in a small chair attached to the cannon and watched the lighted screen before him. Focussing it carefully he stood aside so they could see the image he had brought in.

The girl on the screen was Joyce Walters. Her face was streaked with dirt behind the wheel of a truck. Then the screen faded and the entire truck was in its viewfinder. The screen blanked.

Grumpy turned pale.

"The devil," he howled. "He's going to send that damned ghost truck after her."

Lawson dashed at the glass, pounding against its glittering face with his bare fists.

Masters grinned at him with satanic delight. His voice came over the speaker softly.

"You like pictures," he purred. "This one should be interesting."

He sat down, twisted the dial and the machine started to hum with power. Nothing visible occurred at the mouth of the cannon, but down across the valley a truck appeared against the surface of the Trans-World.

"Phantom Transport," Walters whispered through dry lips.

Lawson watched closely. Joyce knew about the ghost truck. If only she would . . .

THE double barrel was swinging slowly bringing the trucks closer. Then Loa See smiled. By the Grace of God, Joyce had been on guard. Her transport stopped slowly. The door flashed open in the moonlight and her tiny figure shadowed against the green plastic. She was running across it into the heavy pine forest beyond.

The trucks met in a sickening flash. Power roared from the machine and sent Joyce's transport reeling out of sight into the canyon beyond the road. Masters stood up from the machine and snapped off the power.

"She escaped," he said without bitterness. "But like chess, the moves were fascinating."

"Hell will be interesting for you," Lawson said. "And you'll have plenty of time to finish your game there."

Masters laughed. It was cruel—emotionless.

"For a rat in a trap," he said evenly, "you talk like a lion with teeth."

Joyce was in the forest somewhere close to cliff house. If she could only find the tunnel—perhaps . . . ? Lawson would have to stall for a while.

"You're not as safe as you think," he said. "There is a whole troop of soldiers following that girl. They know about this place."

Masters chuckled.

"Look," he said, and switched on the tela-screen. "I know exactly what goes on between here and West Station."

He turned the dial, letting them watch as the entire length of highway unreeled on the screen. A hopeless silence fell upon them. Not a truck marred the surface of Translucent Highway.

"In a moment," Masters said, "I will reap the harvest I've watched grow these past years."

Loa See clutched Arrow's hand.

"The cannon," she whispered. "It is

powerful enough to blow West Station from the map."

"I know." Arrow's eyes were on the weapon. "That's why I had to come back."

Grumpy stared at him.

"That's why you asked Richards to wait." He drew out his watch and looked at it. "Five minutes . . ."

AS THOUGH anticipating their thoughts, Masters switched the screen on a new picture. In miniature they saw the Trans-World Highway at West Station, where it went to sea. For miles the highway swarmed with mono-steel tanks, flashing under powerful searchlights. The tanks had advanced within a hundred yards of the white hot electric fence and were waiting with their snub noses pointed toward West Station. Waiting to swarm over the country like a vast colony of locusts, spitting death at everything in their path.

"You see," Warren Masters talked like a professor to his class, "the gun's real purpose is to knock your atomic power station from the map. With one well placed shot I will cool those wires and lay your country open to the Japanese army."

"And you call yourself an American," Walters spat disgustedly at him through the glass.

"Do I?" Masters looked at him with mock surprise. Then he grinned sarcastically at Loa See. "What do you think, little daughter of the cowardly dragon?"

His words clipped short, and she did not answer. They were staring at each other through the glass wall.

Lawson saw a sudden movement against the wall behind Masters. How she came there he couldn't guess, but Joyce Walters was approaching Masters' back stealthily, a large pine club

in her hand. She edged toward him slowly, inch by inch, her face white and bloodless with fear.

If he could keep Masters from turning around?

To keep Masters' eyes on them, Lawson turned suddenly on the girl. Loa See's eyes flew wide open as he slapped her cheek gently with his hand. Then she saw him wink deliberately and knew it was some sort of a game.

"Dog," she cried in mock fury. "You turn on me who has been your friend."

"I'm no friend of a Jap," Arrow said. He knew she had seen Joyce by now, and felt Masters' eyes on his back. The game was working. "You can't feed me a line like . . ."

Thud . . .

Lawson turned toward the glass. With a cry of pain Masters went to his knees, arms thrown over his head in bewilderment and pain. The club came down again and Joyce was standing above him, the club hanging limply in her hand. She looked toward them, dropped the club and started to sob.

"There is no time to lose," Loa See rushed to the wall. "Miss Masters," she shouted, "quickly. The row of buttons on the wall. Press the third one."

PUZZLED, Joyce followed the girl's finger toward the wall switch board. She pushed the button and the glass wall went up smoothly into the rock. Loa See ran swiftly to the cannon and sat down before it. Walters grunted as he lifted Masters and tossed him into a far corner. Then he picked up the stout club Joyce had dropped. Spitting on his palms he rubbed them, and shook the club threateningly.

"If he comes around this time . . ."

The tela-screen glowed at once under Loa See's experienced fingers. Hugh Richards would throw the switch and destroy the Trans-World in just five

minutes. On the screen, the Jap tanks were firing swiftly, battering at the great metropolis of West Station. The power house had already fallen. The electric wires were cooling—almost black. In a few minutes . . .

Loa See worked feverishly over a large, delicately balanced wheel on the side of the machine. She motioned Lawson to her side.

"Turn," she ordered. "Turn it swiftly."

He clutched the wheel and sent it spinning. They must depend on the girl now. Joyce stood with her arm around Grumpy's waist. The cannon barrel grew out of itself in telescoped sections, until its long length was twenty feet from the face of the cliff. Under the fingers of Loa See, the switch board flashed and glittered with light.

The barrel swung around full length toward West Station.

"The switches," she cried. "Turn them all on."

Arrow ran to the wall. He slammed the row of switches down with all the speed he could muster. Power started to hum through the room.

The machine was connected with great dynamos below in the cliff. Atomic power was collecting in the magazine of the cannon. Now the place was getting hot. Steam poured away from the gun, and the room throbbed with power.

Lawson admired the business-like way Loa See handled the big gun. Her long hair was still falling to her waist, and the dainty white hands moved so fast against the black of the gun controls that he could hardly follow their motions.

Grumpy and Joyce were standing close. They all realized the life of a nation rested now on these small, dependable shoulders.

A sigh escaped her lips.

"We are ready," she said simply, and stood up. Lawson bent forward and looked into the small sight.

"My God," he gasped.

The end of the highway stood out clear and sharp on the glass. The gun was aimed straight at the line of tanks that swept along the oceanic bridge.

He stepped aside and waited. Grumpy looked at his watch.

"One minute," he said, and licked his lips to moisten them.

Lawson looked at Loa See.

"It is your privilege," she said. "I have done my work. This is man's glory."

Looking into her heart, Arrow understood. He sat down quickly and pushed his finger against the trigger.

"When you are ready," she said.

THE ROOM was like an oven now, motors under them roaring powerfully. Masters, forgotten in the corner, tried to arise. Grumpy tapped him absent-mindedly with the club and he groaned.

Arrow took one more look at the scene on the glass. Tanks by the thousands were streaming through the blackened wire at the head of the highway. He tipped the trigger back gently, eyes glued to the sight. The light in the room dimmed. The hum of a death ray sounded powerfully. The motors stopped short, thrown off by the force of the cannon.

The rebound of the gun shook the room as though it were hit by an earthquake, and Lawson hoped it was built to stand the strain.

His face lighted with what he saw on the sight-glass. The trigger stayed where he had drawn it, draining the full power from the cannon.

At West Station the night went suddenly white with flame. He remembered with a sigh of relief that the ray

affected only steel. Japanese tanks melted down to raw metal and dripped, white hot, over the surface of the highway and into a boiling sea. The flame of the gun, invisible here, was roaring along the Highway toward the sea as far as the human eye could see. Not more than sixty seconds had elapsed since he released the trigger. Yet the highway was cleared of the invader. He turned away slowly, sweat standing on his face.

Grumpy bent over the sight. The ray cannon seemed to die as its power drained. Only the sight remained clear.

"Jumping Jerusalem!" Walters exclaimed. "Cleaned every last one of 'em off the map."

Lawson was watching Loa See and Joyce Walters, his eyes narrowed oddly.

"I'm thinking," he said suddenly, "that we owe this whole thing to you girls."

Loa See smiled.

"Miss Walters saved us," she reminded him. "We would have never used the gun if she had not found the secret hallway after Masters left it open in his haste to reach the gun."

Joyce threw her arm around the girl's waist.

"I suppose," she answered, "in letting us escape after saving Arrow and Dad, and showing us how to use the gun, you didn't do your part!"

GRUMPY WALTERS chuckled suddenly.

"Old Hugh Richards will be wondering what the hell has happened, and thinking it's a pretty good world after all," he said. "Let's get out of here and back where we belong."

His eyes fell on Masters and going to him, Walters jerked the man roughly to his feet.

"Good God," he muttered. "It's no wonder he made that crack about being

an American."

Masters threw a feeble hand in front of his face, trying to hide it from them. Walters smashed a thick fist to his chin and Masters twisted around, arms at his side.

The heat of the room had melted the thin, waxoid mask from his features. It was hanging to his chin like a gutted candle, and the smooth delicate cheeks had vanished with it.

Warren Masters was Japanese. Slanted eyes, scarred yellow face, leered at them like something unclean and terrible.

Loa See looked at him unsmilingly.

"You see, Masters," she said softly, "I have worked long to unmask you. You should have known you couldn't win against our country."

"Our country is right," Grumpy told her warmly. "From now on you're a full fledged American, and you'll get every medal I can find in the government building."

Joyce was watching Arrow with laughing eyes. Her hair had fallen thick and rebellious about a tired face. The smile on her lips was a question.

He crossed the room and held her at arms' length.

"You've been a great sport," he said quietly. "If you hadn't knocked Masters out of the ring, we'd all be pushing up wild flowers."

She grinned teasingly.

"I had to take care of Grumpy," she said, and her father snorted. "He never could get around without me."

There was a deeper meaning to her words. A warning that words of apology were not wanted.

Loa See stood a few feet away. There was a sad aloofness about the girl that gave her the touch of a goddess. She smiled as they turned and the expression of hopelessness was gone.

Fingering the folds of her kimona

she swept forward and went to her knees before Lawson. The garment fanned out and her head dipped to the floor. Looking up again, her eyes were for him alone.

"I bow to a strange, brave man," she said in a low whisper. "You have helped me redeem myself and I shall be eternally grateful for one moment of ecstasy."

Dead silence held them as she arose and walked toward the door.

"WAIT a minute," Grumpy said, and took her arm. "This is no time to leave."

"I have work that is not done," she answered and drew away from him. "It is your task to dispose of him."

She pointed a rapier-like finger at Masters. Before Grumpy could hold her, Loa See had slipped away and was gone down the long stairs.

Grumpy grinned oddly.

"So she wants me to take care of the skunk, does she?"

He leaned over Masters and planted a heavy kick in his ribs. Then turning, he started to speak to Lawson and found he had gone.

Joyce waved an airy arm toward the door.

"He's a good man," she said with a grin. "Let's take care of this scum."

Walters drew out a heavy jack-knife. He opened the blade that was six inches to the hilt. Masters started to groan and sat up.

"Shut up," Grumpy ordered. "I ought to shoot you with your own cannon, but I'd be insulted to pull the trigger."

He tossed the heavy knife at the man's feet and turned away. Taking Joyce by the hand he led her to the door. Over his shoulder he said to Masters.

"There's an old custom in your country that's pretty handy." He looked

back meaningly at the knife. "You might save us the trouble."

He closed the door and waited. A movement came from within the room. Then a low moan of pain and Masters' body hit the floor with a thud.

"Let's get out of this mess," Joyce said. A shiver ran through her body. "I'm going to keep an eye on you from now on."

"Nuts," Grumpy answered. "You're not out of the cradle yet, yourself."

* * *

ARROW LAWSON searched the rooms below the gun chamber, but could find no trace of the girl, Loa See. His head was swimming with emotions entirely strange to one who usually had an answer for everything.

Leaving the tunnel entrance he heard light footsteps going away ahead of him on the gravel path. He found her kneeling over a mountain brook, her shoulders bathed in moonlight. Walking silently he stopped behind her.

"That's a fine way to walk out on me," he said.

The girl jumped, startled by his presence. She had been bathing her face in the water. Without looking around, she said in a soft puzzled voice.

"You followed me here—why?"

"Do you have to make me answer that?" He put his hands on her shoulders, trying to force her gently around toward him.

"No, wait," she eluded his grasp and looked away toward the moonlight over the valley. "You do care for me, this way?"

He was puzzled.

"I don't know what you mean by *this way*," he said. "But ever since that night in the tunnel, I've known you were mine."

Her hands went slowly to her face, and he was afraid she would cry.

"Then," she said in a tenderness that

overwhelmed him, "perhaps you will be as glad to find me unmasked as you were surprised at Warren Masters."

Sweeping around, she faced him with a glowing, radiant smile. Loa See was no more an Oriental. The lips that met his were wet and warm, the cheeks flushed, but her eyes were round and the cruel makeup splints that held them slanted, were gone.

Sometime a little later he said in a

mock serious voice,

"Thought you were smart, fooling me that way."

She only held him closer, and whispered in his ear.

"I had to be smart. I'd rather have lost you than know you wouldn't have taken me as I was."

Then—slowly . . .

"But it *is* good to be an American girl again. I had almost forgotten."



(Continued from page 6)

nate Paul's series with Settles' to break up both and make for a better variety.

THIS issue will hit the stands on December 10th. On December 16 the fourth issue of our big sister magazine, *Mammoth Detective*, will make its appearance right alongside. May we just suggest that if you like the stories in this magazine, you'll find stories just as good in our detective magazine—and we have a feeling you all enjoy a good mystery. There are nineteen complete stories in the issue, by such authors as Nelson S. Bond, Leigh Brackett, Robert Leslie Bellem, Leroy Yerxa (to mention authors already familiar to you in *AMAZING's* pages), C. S. Wallace, Ellery Watson Calder, Dale Clark, Frank Marks, Thomas Thursday, Robert C. Blackmon, John Scott Douglas, Arthur Nelson, and many others famous in the detective field.

NO doubt many of you readers noticed that your editor committed a "boner" in the last issue, and we expect to get a lot of letters about it. So we'll try to make a "joke" of it. Get set, readers, joke coming! David Wright O'Brien, it seems, has lost something. He advertises for it on the front cover of the January issue of *AMAZING STORIES*. Which, we say, is *really* a place to advertise! He says: "Bring Back My Body." If anyone has seen his body, please notify him. Also don't try to find it on the contents page, or inside the magazine, because it isn't there! Yep, we put a title on the cover, and then clean forgot to put it in the book! Now pardon us while we cover our confusion. But really, readers, O'Brien did write a story called "Bring Back My Body" and we'll run it in a future issue, more than likely *not* featured on the cover! After all, once is enough, isn't it?

AS we write this column, voting day is just past.

We won't venture any amazing comments on it, because elections are elections. But it reminds us of many stories of "after-the-war" fiction published in our magazine. Just what are the voters going to do after the war? Are we going to keep on voting party politics? Are we going to keep on making a distinction between Americans? Are we going to continue to consider that voting is *our* privilege alone, and no business of the outside world? Are we going to consider that there is an *outside* world? It's time, we think, for Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, Communists—*every-one* with any ideas of freedom in their heads, to begin planning just what kind of a world state we are going to vote in when this is all over. Whatever we decide, it had better not be "politics." Because if we get to "voting" (another name for fighting?) among ourselves, we'll pull that old ostrich trick again, sure as shooting! No "party" is going to be responsible for *winning* this war, no "party" is responsible for this war, and no "party" is going to get any *credit* for the peace, when it comes. This victory is for *free, united, equal* men.

EVER watch someone pick off the loose pieces of tobacco from his tongue after smoking a cigarette? Now an inventor claims that no loose shreds of tobacco will find their way into your mouth if the end of your cigarette is impregnated with a solution of ethyl alcohol. It is said that the solution stiffens and waterproofs the paper at the mouth end of the cigarette and binds the tobacco shreds together so that they do not become loose.

The composition is non-toxic, claims the inventor, and has absolutely no effect on the taste or odor of the smoke. Also, lighting the wrong end of the cigarette by mistake produces no bad results.

A NEW invention to improve the present form cyclotron, the powerful atom-smasher invented by Dr. E. O. Lawrence of the University of California, now being used in many laboratories, is claimed to give more punch to its atomic bullets.

The device was granted U. S. Patent 2,229,572,

awarded to Julius Jonas, of Zurich, Switzerland. His rights have been assigned to Aktiengesellschaft Brown, Boverie and Cie, of Baden, Switzerland.

Mr. Jonas claims that cyclotrons, as now constructed, neglect the fact that, as the atomic bullets are speeded by being whirled around and around, their mass increases, in accordance with the relativity theory. This sets a limit to their speed with current designs.

In the ordinary cyclotron, the electrical field which acts on the accelerating particles is constant. Mr. Jonas says the improvement "comprises progressively increasing the strength of the electric field from the center to the outer portion thereof by an amount equivalent to the retardation of the charged particles due to the relativistic mass increase of the charged particles at extremely high velocities." What this really means is that as the particles move in larger and larger circles, and faster and faster, more electricity is put into them to compensate for the increased mass or weight.

DR. RALPH E. WILLIAMSON, of the Yerkes Observatory of the University of Chicago, reported that a period of one hundred million million years would be required for one star, by gravitational attraction, to pull another out of its path, when they are as far apart as they are in this part of the universe. Even to change the path by half a degree, which is the diameter that the moon seems to have in the sky, would take about three billion years.

This result is important in the study of the motions of the stars in the Milky Way System of stars, of which earth is a part, and of other such galaxies. It shows that the effects of the encounter of one star with another can be ignored in such systems. On the other hand, Mr. Williamson said, in the globular star clusters, it can be important. These are ball-shaped groups of thousands of stars, which are closer together than around the sun. Such encounters, more frequent, might produce greater effects.

MANY a crime has been perpetrated because of chloral hydrate, ingredient of "knockout drops" with which criminals used to drug their victims, but it is now proving itself valuable in the revival of valuable documents charred by fire.

W. D. Taylor and Henry J. Walls, two research workers in the Metropolitan Police Laboratory of London, give a brief description of their method for treating charred documents to restore their legibility.

The blackened pages are covered with a 25 per cent solution of chloral hydrate in alcohol, then dried at 140 degrees F. This is repeated several times until a mass of chloral hydrate crystals appears on the surface. A final treatment is given with a similar solution to which ten per cent of glycerin has been added. After drying, the document is ready to be photographed.

This method works equally well with printed and typewritten matter, according to the two scientists, and reading matter on both sides of the page is restored.

No chemical or physical explanation has yet been found for the process, but investigations on its basis are going forward, with the hope of further improvements. It has been found especially valuable in the restoration of the many documents charred in fires following incendiary raids.

MOST of us have read and remember the stirring classical poem "The Ancient Mariner" based on the superstition that seeing an albatross meant death or bad luck.

Now the Mandel Expedition of the Field Museum of Natural History have captured in the Galapagos islands two male albatrosses believed to be the only living specimens of their kind in captivity. These, along with other birds and reptiles collected will be turned over to Chicago's Brookfield Zoo. The expedition has also brought back about 2,000 skins and preserved specimens representing the bird, reptile and fish faunas of the fifteen islands visited. They will be placed in the Field Museum in Chicago.

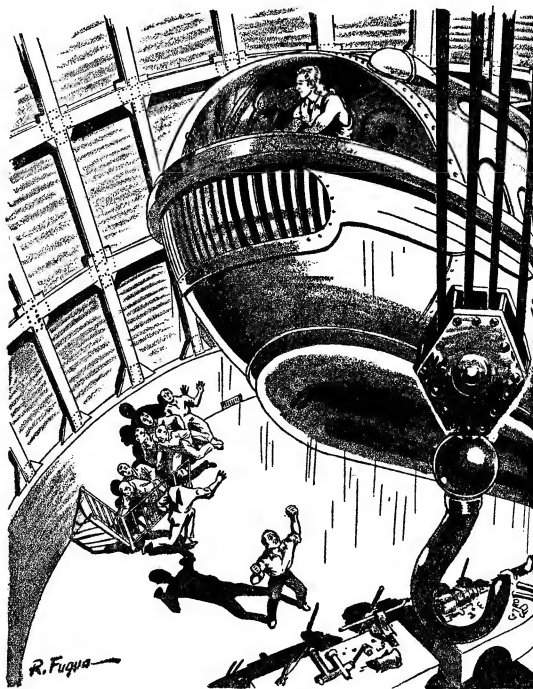
PETROLEUM scientists believe they have hit on a new way of locating oil. This new exploration is that of burning vegetables to find oil. The hypothesis, yet to be proved, is based on the fact that certain plants tend to concentrate particular basic chemical elements in their tissues, when traces of these elements exist in the soil. If certain elements can be proved present in a specific underground geologic formation at one oil field, and if analysis of plant ashes in another location shows the same elements, chances are that the same geologic formation is buried under the spot where the plants grow.

For quite a number of years oil men have been following particular geologic formations, that proved productive in one part of the country, for hundreds of miles in the hope that the formation that hid an oil sand in Oklahoma will also have oil sands in California. Core drillings and micro-paleontology, relatively inexpensive, have been used in this type of oil exploration. Now plant-ash analysis may be a useful new tool for this same quest.

18, 000,000,000 ounces of silver—that's the estimated amount collected by the human race. Of this, about one-third is supposed to have been worn away, lost, or so well hidden that its whereabouts are not known. One-third is supposed to be in the world's monetary stock, and the remaining one-third is supposed to be hoarded or in silverware, plates, and other useful articles.

WHICH brings us to the end of this month's Observatory. Next month another super-duper issue! Just wait and see!
Rap

ARD of the SUN-



Yolv stood beneath the ship, fists uplifted, screaming with rage

SET PEOPLE

by

STANTON A. COBLENTZ

There was no longer a place for them on Earth. So Ard turned his eyes to the stars

THE SKY was a pale pinkish gray above the Land of Endless Winter. High in the west hung the huge red sun, like a great bloodshot eye shaded with little patches of black. In the east a half moon, of enormous dimensions, shone with a ruddy light. A gale was howling, as it howled nine days out of every ten; the landscape was all encrusted with ice and snow, which, glowing with a faint rose-flame, was spread fantastically in hummocks, pinnacles and spires across the hills and plains that, several million years before, had formed a peaceful green countryside.

Only in one spot was the monotony varied. In the cup-like hollow of a valley, where ages ago a mighty river had wound, was a mass that could not be mistaken for a work of nature. At a distance it looked cloudy and fairy-like; but, on closer approach, it was seen to be composed of mushroom-shaped buildings. There were scores of them, each several hundred feet high; and they were grouped side by side with upper edges that touched, and were of a shimmery opal tint, and were almost windowless, although steel-gray projec-



tions like chimneys jutted from their roofs.

Within one of the greatest of these edifices, a youth was at work. Agile and slender, with classic features, long flaxen hair flowing down across his shoulders, and large lively flashing eyes, he was hammering away at a strange-looking machine—a long gleaming metallic cylinder, fish-shaped, but larger than the mighty whales that had swum the seas ages before.

"Soon it will be done, Glordu," he said to the girl who, clad in her synthetic robe of Purple Analin, smiled up at him out of her brilliant great blue eyes. "I waited till today to tell you, for I wished first to know it would succeed."

Glordu glanced about her through the vast vacant space of the Alabaster Palace. She shivered, despite the heat thrown out by the sun-motor; the gray light of day, sweeping down through the crystalline roof, fell wanly on her face and on that of Ard her lover.

"I have told no one about it," the man rushed on, eagerly. "I have dug out the ancient books, which show that our fathers many milleniums ago made curious engines. One was a car which could fly to other worlds. Often they visited Mars and Jupiter. By following the diagrams, and working all my spare hours for years, I have copied this invention. An air-tight pressure-resisting envelope and a very powerful motor—these were the things most needed for the Planet Ship, and these I have made. Day by day I have stored up some of my allotment of sun-power, until now I have enough to fly to—"

ABRUPTLY Ard broke short. Up from the Spiral Stairway to the right, a lean stooping figure had come gliding, in the manner of a weasel stalking its prey. There was a malignant

glitter in the screwed-up little yellow-green eyes; the wily face had a shine of sarcastic enjoyment.

"Ah, my dear comrades!" he greeted them, rubbing his thin little hands together slyly. "What do you here?"

Ard glanced at the newcomer, aware that his presence boded no good. For had not Yolv been his rival for Glordu's hand? Had he not been beaten in the Contest of Manhood, and defeated for the girl's favor, only two moons ago? And had he not withdrawn into himself, in his morose, bitter way, and been heard swearing vengeance?

"What matters it to you what we do?" flung back Ard, angered to know that Yolv had been spying upon him.

Yolv smiled faintly, sardonically. "Perhaps it matters much, brother," he lisped, using the term of address common among the Sunset People, "Are you sure you have the consent of Zyl the Truth-Sayer? Are you sure the Elders know of your actions? And that you have respected the law against inhabiting deserted palaces?"

Resolutely the girl had placed herself in his path. "Away with your sneers and your threats, Yolv!" she challenged, her eyes a blaze of blue flame, while defiantly she flung back her great masses of yellow hair. "Ard has broken no law! And since when have you joined the Moral Correction Squad?"

Yolv's eyes were hard and malicious as a rattlesnake's as he snarled, "You shall see! You shall see, my haughty lady! By the beards of the Elders! I shall yet put that proud head of yours low in the dust!"

"Not before your tongue of venom has been pulled out, you spawn of the mire!" roared Ard, approaching the intruder with clenched fists. But Yolv had already slunk away down the spiral stairs.

"What a vile crawling insect! To

think he would have claimed me in the Blessed Bonds!" shuddered Glordu. "Ugh! Let us forget him! Let us remember instead, beloved, that in two moons more—only two short moons—"

A sound like a siren, remote yet clear-pitched, cut her short with its long-drawn fluctuating tones. For over a minute the din lasted, while the pair stared at one another aghast. Only on rare occasions—usually at times of public emergency—was the assembly whistle blown.

"Beloved, be not afraid," advised Ard, as he and Glordu set off together toward the Crystal Pavilion, where all citizens were expected to gather when the assembly whistle blew. "I know not what it means, but doubtless the Elders have been weighing heavy decisions."

"I, too, know not what it means," returned Glordu, in low, almost inaudible tones, "yet somehow, I can say not why, beloved, a dread sinks to my very heart."

A FEW minutes later, when they reached the Crystal Pavilion, a multitude of several thousands had gathered on the spacious opaline floor. Grim-browed and troubled, their heads great-domed, their faces waxy white in the milky light that radiated from patches on the vaulted ceiling, they surrounded a platform that reached above them to a height of ten feet.

Upon this eminence stood Zyl—Zyl, the Supreme Elder, the wisest of all the wise men of the Land of Endless Winter. He was but a small figure, little more than five feet tall—gaunt, white-haired, with a venerable white beard. But about his presence, his bearing, and most of all about the vivid deep fiery blue of his eyes, there was something unspeakably august.

"Hear me, People of the Sunset!"

Instant silence fell; it was considered

sacrilegious to be heard above the voice of Zyl. But Ard and Glordu, worming their way to the front of the crowd, clutched meaningly at one another's hands as, with a shock of unpleasant surprise, they found themselves staring into the leering eyes of Yolv.

But they could give no thought to their enemy as they listened, absorbed, to the words of the Truth-Sayer.

"Hear me, People of the Sunset! As you know, we have just entered the two thousandth millenium of our era. But it is not with gladness that we greet the new age. Millions of years have passed since the sun began to lose its light and power. Millions of years since the Great Cold came, and man had to leave the outdoor world and live behind walls, where he has made food and clothing from the water, the air and the rocks, and gained heat and power from the sun, which continued to offer giant energy. Yet you know how the sun-power dwindled throughout the milleniums, and with it our fountain of heat and nurture . . . until the sun-machines could no longer produce enough for us all. And you know how our numbers have diminished, and many evacuations of our people have been ordered."

Zyl paused for effect; while his hearers glanced at one another with taut, strained faces, well knowing what that dread word, evacuation, meant.

"We had hoped that no new necessity would descend upon us," Zyl went on. "But Drav, who directs the Sun Generators, has made his report; and the Council of Elders has had no choice. Since the previous readings, the solar energy has diminished five and forty-two one hundredths per cent. Though we have produced all the food possible under this limited energy, we have fast been using up our reserves; hence the time has come when, lest we all starve, there must be another evacuation."

The faces of the people were tenser than ever. At one end of the audience, a groan escaped; at another end, a sigh. Yet most of the listeners stood stoical and silent.

"Yes, my kindred," went on Zyl, sadly, "we must again turn the Wheel of Fortune. One hundred must be chosen. One hundred will go forth into the World of Winter, in order that their brothers and sisters may live. Many times our fathers and mothers have met the test. We can do no less."

The silence that had fallen was as the silence of the grave. Men stared at their companions, speechless. Their faces, pallid before, were now white as paper.

Meanwhile Ard clutched Glordu's arm so tightly that, unconsciously, she winced. But the look in his eyes was reassuring. "Never mind, beloved," he seemed to say, "whatever happens, all will be well with us!"

But like a peel of doom the voice of Zyl sounded in their ears,

"We will proceed at once to draw the lots!"

THE wheel of Fortune was a simple machine. It consisted merely of a wide, rough disk, on which several thousand little cubes were placed, each bearing the official number of one of the adult inhabitants of the Land of Winter. For several minutes the cubes were shuffled by a blindfolded man; then, by means of a little sun-motor, the disk was set in rotation. As it swung around with ever-increasing rapidity, the cubes were whirled toward the edge of the disk, and one by one were flung off. Those which were thus discarded were carefully gathered up; and when their number had reached one hundred, the whirling of the Wheel of Fortune was checked.

Only the rattling of the machine and

the heavy breathing of bystanders was audible as the people watched the dread game. Every one knew that this was a gamble for the highest stakes—a gamble for life itself. Those whose numbers were discarded by the Wheel would be evacuated into the lethal cold. And no one knew whose fate had been sealed every time a cube fell with a dull click off the revolving disk.

When the hundredth cube had been thrown off, Zyl flung out one hand imperiously. "Yolv," he commanded, as his gaze rested upon the lean, stooping youth with the twisted nose, "you will read the findings!"

At this pronouncement, a chill struck Ard's heart. He saw the pleased gleam in Yolv's screwed-up little yellow-green eyes; and he knew that the choice foretold nothing good.

Meanwhile Zyl's ranging eye had fallen upon the young man at Glordu's side; and again his voice rang out briskly.

"You, Ard, will record the findings."

Promptly Ard took his place at the foot of Zyl's platform. It was an honor thus to be chosen by the Truth-Sayer.

He saw Glordu smiling at him as the time came for Yolv to pick up and read the first cube—smiling gravely yet sweetly out of her big expressive eyes. But most of all he was aware of the tenseness of the audience. They had schooled themselves to stoicism—but who can be wholly unmoved when he is about to hear the voice of fate?

Yolv's eyes shot out a yellowish flash of enjoyment as he reached for the first cube. For a second he hesitated; then, with a loud, shrill enunciation, he read,

"1109 C!"

A WOMAN at the rear of the crowd let out a muffled cry; muttered something that sounded like, "Gran! Gran! Gran!"; then slumped to the

floor, and had to be half led, half carried out. And Ard's eyes were dim as he realized that 1109 C was the number of Gran, the son of Desdu, the woman who had made the grief-stricken demonstration.

"576 D!" read Yolv. And the face of a man to the right showed a tightening of the muscles. But not by any other sign did Mogue, who was a father of three sons and an Elder of the nation, give proof that his doom had been uttered.

"0245 E!"

There was no one yet present who answered to that number, but Ard felt as if a chill hand had brushed his cheek as he remembered that this was the designation of Ooll, one of the gay young company that had just emerged from the School of Manhood.

"Perhaps my turn will come next!" Ard reflected, as Yolv took up another cube. But no! The next choice would cause little pain; it was Sarcuru, a woman who had lacerated every one's feelings with her merciless tongue.

On and on they went. Fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety numbers he read. And Ard saw faces turn pale and teeth bite sternly at lower lips as many of those present were designated, or as they recognized the numbers of their kindred or friends.

Finally all but one of the cubes had been read. Relieved to be so near the end of his distasteful and terrible duties, Ard saw Yolv glancing curiously at the last of the little pieces. A wicked yellow-green glint came into his eyes, somehow seeming to accentuate the twist of his crooked nose. His deft, lean fingers twitched queerly. And a dread, a suspicion, an appalling certainty clutched at Ard's mind as the reader glanced at the last of the little pieces, and called out,

"2212 A!"

Ard did not need to hear Glordu's little gasp of horror. He did not need to see how her face blanched, and her eyes contracted in terror that she strove to hide. By the dull weight that descended upon him, he knew that his beloved was to be among the evacuees.

Choking down his frenzy against Yolv—for he was positive that somehow, though it could not be proved, his rival had manipulated the Cubes of Destiny—the young man dashed to Glordu's side. He took her into his arms; he strove despairingly to console her. But she turned from him, almost in fury. "No, no!" she cried, half sobbing. "Do not try to deter me! You must not deter me from my duty! It is the Wheel of Fortune! The word of Destiny!"

Then, on a wild impulse, he turned toward Zyl the Truth-Sayer. "Listen! Listen, O Zyl! No watch was kept over the hands of Yolv! They are quick and clever! To switch the cubes is but child's play—"

The whole frame of the Truth-Sayer shook with anger as he interrupted,

"What is that, Ard? You dare accuse one of your brothers? Your mind must be turned with grief—otherwise, I could not forgive you. We People of the Sunset are men of honor! And the honor of a True Man cannot be challenged!"

Ard bowed his head. He knew the ancient law; the honor of a True Man—a man entrusted with public duty—could not be challenged. There was no possible appeal.

YET as he saw the triumphant sparkle in Yolv's eyes, some certainty deeper than sight or speech told him that his charge had not been unjustified.

There was only one other track he could take. "Then grant a favor! A

favor, O Zyl!" he entreated. "Let me be—let me be Glordu's substitute! Let me go instead!"

Stern and indignant rang out the voice of Zyl:

"Do you not know the law, my son? Do you not know that substitutes are forbidden? Long ago the Elders do decreed, believing that he who would accept another's sacrifice is not worth saving. I am grieved for you, my son. Grieved for one so young and fair as Glordu. But the Wheel of Fortune is inexorable."

"Beloved, it is best—best as it is," asserted the girl, standing up erect and firm, her bosom swelling, her eyes flashing defiance at Yolv. "I would be no worthy Daughter of the Sunset if I could not do my duty by my people!"

Ard bowed his head, and struggled to keep back his emotion. Even though he knew—and Glordu knew—whose fingers had tampered with the sacred Cubes of Destiny, he understood the futility of further protest. Yet never had the girl seemed more desirable to him, never more lovely, never more worthy of saving than now, when she confronted him with pale, sad, resolute face, unable to keep back the tears that flooded to her great luminous eyes . . . so infinitely remote in her sorrow, yet so much dearer than ever now that she stood under sentence of inescapable death.

Yet was her doom inescapable? Was there not one dim, eleventh hour chance to save her? The idea of defying the will of the Elders appeared so terrible that Ard would never have conceived it for his own sake alone. Yet how could he permit her to die? How allow Yolv's treachery to triumph? In his mind the outlines of a plan took form . . . a plan so wild, so fantastic that at times he hardly dared consider it at all.

It was this that lit a faint spark of hope in his mind when the time came to say farewell to Glordu. According to an old ruling, the evacuation had to take place within a day of the drawing of the lots; this was considered a humane provision, lest lamentations be too prolonged. Also, according to an ancient tradition, no tears must be shed at the time of parting. And so Ard forced himself, dry-eyed, to the West Door, which gave upon the Country of the Sunset; and, amid a great crowd, he met Glordu and the other evacuees.

Thanks to a custom many milleniums old, the condemned ones were all heavily attired in synthetic fur robes; and were provided with condensed food sufficient to last for weeks. This practice had arisen in an age when the earth had been less frozen and the unfortunates had had a fighting chance to establish a new home. But today, even though a man could endure the cold for a few hours if he were warmly enough clothed and it were not storming too heavily, there was no chance of surviving overnight amid the ice-cloaked immensity.

None the less, Ard was just a little less disconsolate than the mothers, wives, sons, daughters and friends that, with the air of mourners at a funeral, had come to embrace the departing ones for the last time. "Let them say what they will, it will not be the last time!" he whispered, as he drew Glordu close and she heroically strove to keep back a sob. "Take the trail toward the sunset. Go straight to the Cavern of the Ancients, which is no further off than a man can see on a clear day. Wait there—and do not leave!"

GLORDU nodded, wonderingly; remembering how once, when the weather was fair and calm, they had stolen off together into the Forbidden

Lands of the West; and had come to a great cave, in which were the remains of grotesque extinct animals, with bones bigger than six men's, and horns on their heads. This place they had called the Cavern of the Ancients; and this was their own secret, as it was against all rules to wander off into the Great Cold.

"Wait in the Cavern!" he repeated. "If I do not come, it will be because I cannot!"

"But, beloved, you must not!" she pleaded, in terror; for it had come to her that he wished to die at her side. "That is unworthy, Ard, unworthy of a brave man!" So earnest, so urgent was her appeal that he had to promise not to render up his life as a useless sacrifice.

Now came the final words. Glordu was whisked from him into the arms of her father, her mother, her elder sister; and a commotion of shouts and cries filled the air, broken by the hysterical shriek of a woman who could not obey the rule against lamentations. Then the great west door creaked on its hinges; and a breath that seemed to freeze the spectators' very nostrils swept in from the white out-of-doors. Within a minute, the gate had creaked back into place, and the hundred evacuees were on their way. And only then was Ard overwhelmed by his grief.

All the while, standing in one corner alone and unnoticed, with a faintly sarcastic smile on his twisted features and a gloating light in his yellow-green eyes, an uninvited onlooker stood by like a waiting bird of prey.

SCARCELY had the portals closed upon the evacuees when Ard hastened away. Far through the long galleries he strode, straight to his laboratory in the Alabaster Palace, where he switched on the sun-furnace, and, shiv-

ering a little (for the temperature was below freezing), turned to the long, graceful form of the Planet Ship.

He had still some minor adjustments to make; for he had not expected to navigate the vessel for some time yet. But what if it were not quite ready? Was it not worth taking any chance in order to save his beloved?

For several hours he worked—worked with the speed of madness. He filled the Ship with storage vats of compressed sun energy; loaded it with vials of concentrated Asterax, or synthetic food; added water and medicines; tested the navigating equipment; and tried out the motors. And all the while one thought kept tugging at his mind, "Hurry, hurry, or you will be too late!" He could picture Glordu trudging across those desolate miles toward the Cavern of the Ancients; and knew that if one of the frequent blizzards were to come up, or if she were to mistake her way, or even if she reached the rendezvous and had to remain amid its unendurable cold a single night, she would be lost beyond his power to save.

It may have been some sixth sense that kept distracting his attention. Was it true, or did he only imagine that he heard a faint shuffling now and again over toward the First Spiral Stair to his right? "Most likely it's only the wind blowing," he reassured himself. But whenever he started toward the Spiral Stairs the sound would vanish. "By the wisdom of the Elders, I'm growing scary as a babe!" he told himself. "I can't let my attention wander like this—not if I want to save Glordu!"

After completing the preliminaries, he hastened to the Left Portal, to see that the fastenings were in order. Yes! praised be the memory of the Great Ones! The bolts and catches were ready to be released! But anxiously

he glanced toward the crystalline ceiling, through whose wide vaulted spaces the gray light of the sky seeped in. And his heart sank as he recognized that less than an hour of the precious daylight remained. Less than an hour more, and he would be too late to save Glordu!

Yet would there not still be time, if he hurried? With the vehemence of near-panic, he slipped back into the ship; slammed the doors; made sure that they were air-tight and space-proof; then set the motors into a slow, purring vibration. A blue light flashed on; and by means of scores of tiny wheels, the vessel began to slide along the floor toward the Left Portal.

But even as this movement began, Ard beheld a sight that caused his heart to hammer savagely.

Out of the Spiral Stair to his right, several figures shot up. At their head, smiling insinuatingly from his weird yellowish eyes, was none other than Yolv. Behind him stalked Broln and Urgan and several other grim-looking men with yellow breastplates—members of the Moral Correction Squad, whose duty it was, by means of moral suasion, to lead back any misguided wanderer from the paths of rectitude.

From the agitation with which Yolv pointed at him, Ard knew the whole story. Once more the traitor had been spying upon him!—as might have been evident from those suspicious noises! He had called the Moral Correction Squad in order to prevent the rescue of Glordu!

INWARDLY seething, Ard brought the Planet Ship to a halt; swung the door open; and stepped out.

"Ah, there he is!" Yolv shrilled, in quick, excited tones. "He has built a beast-machine, like those of the brute men of milleniums ago, who almost

wrecked the world!"

"What is this, Ard?" demanded Urgan, severely, as he stepped up to the culprit. "Do you not know it is against the law to imitate the havoc-engines of the Noisy Ages?"

Ard recalled faintly that there was indeed a law to this effect. But no one had attempted to enforce it for centuries. Zyl and the other Elders, in fact, knew just what Ard was doing, and no one had objected.

"Listen, brothers! Listen to the fiendish racket it makes!" snarled Yolv, calling attention to the faint buzzing of the motors. "Let them be stopped at once! Ugh! I shudder to hear those imp sounds!"

Fiercely Ard turned upon his enemy. "What do you mean, you skulking bat of the night? Your jaws drip poison—"

"Yolv is no bat of the night!" denied Broln. "He is a loyal citizen doing his duty to the state!"

The lips of the loyal citizen were distorted into a malignant smirk as Captain Ung, of the Moral Correction Squad, stepped forward.

"There is only one way, Ard. You have broken the ancient commandment. So come with us, and set your case before Zyl the Truth-Sayer. I deceive myself if Yolv will not get the Amber Badge of Luster."

Ard's mind, in this crisis, worked rapidly. Assuredly, Zyl would decide in his favor. But it would take time to hear the case—many hours, perhaps a day of invaluable time, for there would be others to be judged first. And, by then, Glordu would be lost beyond hope of rescue.

"Come, brother, come with us!" Ung was saying. And, seeing himself surrounded, Ard had the sense that all his efforts had been wasted.

But almost at the same instant, a

desperate idea came to him. How fooling he had been to leave the Planet Ship! Yet if only he could get back, there might be a bare chance. The idea, indeed, appeared fantastic, but he was in a mood to clutch at shadows.

Already the hands of Ung and Broln rested restrainingly on his wrists. "Come, brother! This way!"

"At once!" he conceded. And he pretended to start off; then turned back, sharply.

"Just one minute, brothers! I had forgotten! I must stop this machine, lest it explode!"

Eloquently he pointed toward the Planet Ship, the motors of which were still chugging faintly.

The vivid yellow-green flash in the eyes of Yolv showed that he saw through the ruse. His twisted face turned red as he shouted:

"Trust him not, my brothers! Trust him not! This is but some new devil's scheme!"

But the others hesitated. Their knowledge of machinery was slight—had they not heard that the engines of the ancient beast-men had often exploded?

SPONTANEOUSLY they edged away while Ard, profiting from their uncertainty, swung himself into the door of the Planet Ship. As he did so, Yolv, with panther agility, sprang forward. But Ard was a fraction of a second too quick. Restraining his impulse to strike down the aggressor, he gained the safety of the steering compartment, slammed the door in Yolv's face, and switched a lever toward a sign that read, "Full speed upward!"

Only too well he knew that there was but a remote chance. Since the Left Portal had not been opened, he must leave by some other outlet. But the ceiling of the Alabaster Palace was of

a crystalline plastic that might not offer too much resistance. On this possibility he must stake his life!

He pulled the lever and instantly the machine began to rise—to rise at an angle of forty-five degrees. Ard had a glimpse of the astonished, gaping face of Ung as he shuddered and drew back. He saw Yolv rushing beneath him with fists uplifted, and features contorted with rage. Then, with a lurch, the Planet Ship shot upward to the ceiling.

There was a tremendous wrench, a din of splintering and crashing as the fragile plastic shattered into thousands of fragments. Amid the fury and commotion of that blind moment, Ard did not see how the Moral Correction Squad, terrified, ducked from sight down the Spiral Stairs. Nor could he observe how Yolv, having dashed to an exposed position, had realized his peril too late; and, turning to retreat only as the Planet Ship hurtled into the roof, had been blotted out of existence beneath tons of falling plastic.

THE Planet Ship meanwhile, protected by its prow of the adamantine alloy Bardite, had gone through the roof as through gossamer and sailed away undamaged beneath the gray skies.

Fifteen minutes later, in the early twilight, the vessel had settled down on the ice-fields before the Cavern of the Ancients. And Ard, after slipping on his synthetic fur robes, stepped into the outer cold; and anxiously wormed his way into the cave.

A joyous shout greeted him as he pushed into the shadowy depths by means of the sun-torch; and immediately he found himself surrounded by a crowd of jubilant, sobbing, laughing figures, among whom, with a wild leap of the heart, he recognized the slender form of Glordu.

"O beloved, beloved," she cried, as she clung weeping in his arms, "I did not think you would ever come! I did not see how you could! Already the cold was so great we were near to dying!"

"But all our real life lies ahead!" he assured her. And then, observing that there were ten evacuees beside her in the cave—five men and five women—he rapidly formed his plans.

Only a few minutes more, and they were all seated in the Planet Ship, which had been made and provisioned for a good-sized company. And as the vessel rose in air, its prow was pointed

toward the sunset, where the evening star, with a faintly ruddy twinkle, gleamed low in the west. It was toward the shores of the earth's sister world that their flight was aimed; on this younger and warmer globe, mankind was to thrive for ages after it had vanished from its native planet. And Ard and Glordu, the leaders of that small, gallant band of pioneers, were long to be honored as the Pathfinders of the Spaceways, the saviors of their species, and the progenitors of the most illustrious of all the Great Race of Venus.

THE END

PATRIOTIC DOGS

THE army has a dog service which is a definite part of the military forces. Sentinel dogs mount guard with their masters at lonely posts and are invaluable because of their acute hearing and sense of smell. They give warning by growling when someone approaches, but are trained not to bark. Not only this but they are ready to attack an enemy if ordered to do so.

Liaison dogs perform much the same service as carrier pigeons, although they are actually better than pigeons because they have been trained to obey two masters—to deliver a message and re-

turn with the reply. They can carry messages both day and night and more rapidly than men on foot. The messages are enclosed in small cylinders attached to the collar.

Patrol dogs work on a long metal leash and accompany patrol parties. They go ahead and nose out the enemy, if he is in ambush. They are trained not to bark and will attack if necessary.

Watch dogs are used in munition stations, aviation fields and prison camps to keep unauthorized persons from entering the grounds.

A. Morris

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of *Amazing Stories*, published monthly at Chicago, Ill., for October 1, 1942. State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss.: Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of *Amazing Stories* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, W. B. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Editor, R. G. Davis, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Managing Editor, R. A. Palmer, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 540 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.; W. B. Ziff Co., 540 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.; W. B. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.; A. Ziff, 540 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.; R. G. Davis, 540 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.; S. Davis, 540 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs text above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and that affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is:..... (This information is required from daily publications only.) A. T. Pullen. (Signature of business manager.) Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1942.

[Seal.] Lela Rea, Notary Public, (My commission expires January 28, 1946.)

IT'S AN INTERESTING WORLD!

By WESLEY ROLAND

MAKING THEM WEAR LONGER

BY immersing men's socks in a bath of certain colloidal substances suspended in water, the microscopic particles strengthen the fabrics in the twisted threads so that they resist wear three times their usual length of time. There is no change in the texture, color or appearance. The untreated pairs of socks showed a shrinkage of 25 percent while the treated shrank only 4 percent.

The new process can also be used with great success on blankets, underwear and similar garments.

* * *

THE DEATH PREDICTOR

AT a recent meeting of the American College of Surgeons, a device known as the medical electric eye was introduced and explained. It enables the surgeons and anesthetists to see death approaching in the patient and gives them more time to do something to save his life.

The medical electric eye consists of a highly sensitive photo-electric cell which notates the smallest change in the color of the blood below the patient's skin. When the patient's blood darkens in color, this indicates a lessening of the oxygen in the blood which is one of the first signs of approaching death. The electric eye is so sensitive that the slightest change in color is notated immediately which tells the surgeon to act at once and use any emergency means possible to save his patient's life.

The principle used by the device is that a strong light held against a part of the body tends to make that part of the body semi-transparent. The device is so placed that a portion of the patient's blood system passes before the electric eye. Even the slightest decrease in oxygen changes the color of the blood slightly from the normal blood red to the darker red of approaching death. This change is registered by a photo-electric cell much sooner than the human eye could notice the change.

According to Dr. Ray D. McClure of the Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan, the device has only been tried on animals, but the results have proved so successful that they will soon be tried on humans.

* * *

TINY POCKET RESPIRATOR

HAVE you ever wished you could do something to prevent the inhalation of cigarette smoke in a crowded nightclub? Well, a miniature res-

pirator for protection against breathing of smoke or dust has been invented. It is so small that it can be carried in the vest pocket.

The person wearing it can talk, eat, sleep, smoke and even wear glasses. The nose piece is of soft pliable rubber, which will fit a nose of any shape, and the filter is folded in such a manner that about nine square inches of filtration area is provided. Elastic loops, slipped around the ears, hold it in position.

* * *

VISIBLE BREATH

"IT'S so cold out you can see your own breath."

Did you ever stop to wonder what brought about this strange phenomenon? Dr. George R. Wait, of the Department of Terrestrial Magnetism of the Carnegie Institution of Washington reports that 200,000,000 particles in every breath a person exhales is the reason why breath is visible on a clear cold morning. On such a morning, moisture condenses around these particles and becomes visible. The particles from the lungs, in a room where several people are assembled, quickly capture smaller ions, or broken air molecules, already present.

The discovery of these particles, each nearly one hundred times larger than an air molecule was previously unknown to science. The majority of the particles are believed to be electrically charged, either positively or negatively.

* * *

VITAMIN K

SYNTHETIC vitamin K, when fed to an expectant mother, prevents excessive bleeding of a new born baby when injured. Dr. James W. Mull, A. H. Bill, and Helen Skowronski, of the research laboratory of the Maternity Hospital, in Cleveland, reported experiments confirming this fact.

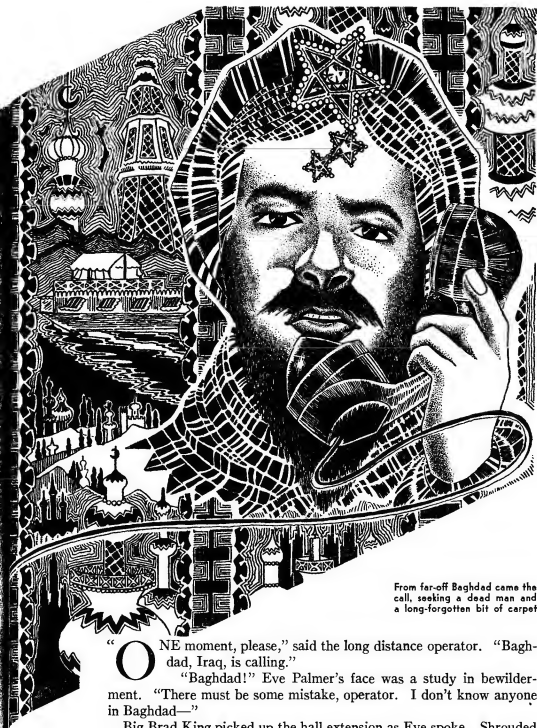
Dr. Mull reported on experiments with one hundred mothers who were given synthetic vitamin K while they were in labor. Tests of the clotting capacity of the blood of the new born child revealed a striking increase in the rapidity of clotting. Only one baby out of the hundred was found to have blood which did not respond to the treatment.

THE Persian Carpet

by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

Nippon, facing defeat, sought aid
from another dimension; and found
the sword of treachery two-edged





From far-off Baghdad came the call, seeking a dead man and a long-forgotten bit of carpet

"ONE moment, please," said the long distance operator. "Baghdad, Iraq, is calling."

"Baghdad!" Eve Palmer's face was a study in bewilderment. "There must be some mistake, operator. I don't know anyone in Baghdad—"

Big Brad King picked up the hall extension as Eve spoke. Shrouded in the passageway's gloom, he eyed the negligee-clad girl admiringly through the open bedroom door. She stood close beside the dressing table, receiver in hand. Two boudoir lamps high-lighted her lithesome yet curvaceous body's blonde beauty. Just now, the young woman's

blue eyes were twin mirrors of puzzlement, their cool sapphire depths set off to perfection by the golden hair framing her face.

"I have a call from Baghdad, Iraq, for Southwick 2300," the telephone operator reiterated firmly. And, in the fainter tone marking conversation with the far end of the wire: "Here is your party, Baghdad."

The admiring grin slowly faded from Brad's good-natured face, replaced by a frown as puzzled as Eve's.

"Baghdad!" he muttered to himself. "What the devil . . ."

"Hello? Hello?" Eve was querying uncertainly.

"Are you there?" came the caller's voice. It had a somehow foreign flavor—an indefinable alien inflection impregnating letter-perfect English. "I wish to speak with *Sahib* Winthrop King, please."

Brad opened his mouth to interrupt. But before he could speak, Eve cut in again.

"Winthrop King!"

"Yes, please. At once. It is a matter of utmost urgency. You may say that Ranjit Saud is calling."

A strange expression flickered across Eve's perfect features. It left her lovely face sober. Brad noted that her firm young breasts suddenly were rising and falling more rapidly than before.

"Are you there? Are you there?"

The girl shook off her brief benumbment.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Uncle Winthrop is dead."

"Dead!"

EVEN over the wire that one-word exclamation was alive with shock. And there was something more, too—dismay, perhaps, tingled with just a hint of underlying, all-pervasive fear.

But in a moment the man who called

himself Ranjit Saud had recovered.

"And you?" he probed anxiously. "You are *Sahib* King's niece? What is your name?"

"Yes, I'm his niece. My name's Eve Palmer." A sudden, avid interest spurred her on. "I'm a trained nurse, so when Uncle Winthrop first fell ill three months ago, he hired me to come and take care of him. I planned to leave right after he passed away, two weeks back. But when his will was read, I found he'd named his son, Brad, and me co-executors for his estate. So I've stayed on—"

Thin lines of irritation etched Brad's face.

"Damned fool!" he grunted. "Does she think this is 'Information Please?'"

Aloud, and with the mouthpiece covered:

"Hold it, Eve. Let's find out what the score is before you spill everything you know."

His voice sent a startled tremor through the girl. She spun about, half-frightened eyes searching for him.

Brad paid her no heed. He spoke into the 'phone:

"This is Brad King talking. I'm Winthrop King's son. What do you want?"

There was a long moment of utter silence. Brad began to think the other had hung up. Then Ranjit Saud spoke, his smooth voice ever so slightly distorted by a note of uncertainty.

"I am at a loss," he said. "I do not know what to say. With *Sahib* King dead . . ."

"It's a cinch I can't do anything for you if I don't know what you want," Brad retorted irritably. "What's more, I hocked my crystal ball last week, so the only way I can find out what's bothering you is for you to tell me."

"Your crystal ball? I do not understand."

"Skip it. Just tell me what you want. If anything. Or maybe you just like to make long distance calls?"

Another long pause.

"I hesitate to imperil you," Ranjit Saud said at last.

"To imperil me?" Brad scowled. "What are you talking about? You sound as if a little man with a long green beard was getting ready to snatch me down a gopher hole."

"A little man with a long green beard—?" The other sounded distinctly bewildered. Then: "Oh. You jest."

More silence.

"Well?"

"I *must* speak! I cannot consider the fate of this Brad King. No. Not even though he is my friend's son. No. Too much is at stake!"

EVEN as he listened, Brad knew the words were not addressed to him—nor, for that matter, to any auditor. They were mere mutterings; the half-subconscious syllables of a man who struggles with himself to reach a decision.

Then:

"I shall explain everything!" Ranjit Saud's voice was clipped, incisive. "Please listen carefully, sir. The world's fate hangs on your understanding and believing the things I am about to tell you."

The caller's grim intensity gripped Brad like a living thing. He felt it prick through him, a thousand needles stabbing at his nerve centers. He glanced through the open doorway at Eve. The tension had caught her, too; lithe figure tense, eyes wide, she flicked her tongue-tip over dry lips.

"You were aware that your father was probably the United States' leading orientalist?" queried Ranjit Saud.

"Sure. Of course."

"Perhaps you knew also that he was one of the world's greatest living authorities on the occult?"

"No, I didn't." Brad's face was even more puzzled than before at this strange new turn of the conversation.

"He was." The other was laconic to the point of curttness. And, somehow, the very abruptness of his speech lent it a force and fire that held big Brad more firmly than any wild hyperbole. Yet the American fought down his first impulse to be impressed.

"I don't get it," he grunted. "You aren't paying toll charges clear from Baghdad just to tell me how smart Dad was. We weren't interested in the same things at all, but I don't need a special lecture to convince me that he was tops in anything he decided to bone up on—"

THE caller interrupted:

"Your father was owner of a valuable oriental carpet. It is perhaps six feet square, and covered with an intricate arabesque pattern far removed from the ordinary designs. It is basically Persian, yet—"

"There's more than thirty rooms in this house, and every one of 'em is knee-deep in oriental curios," Brad broke in. "I'll bet there are fifty rugs that answer your description."

"Then you must gather together all these carpets!" There was a note of frenzy in Ranjit Saud's voice. "Put them where they can be watched! Place an armed guard upon them! I shall come at once, as fast as I can. But meantime, let nothing befall them—"

"Suppose you tell me why, first. Just what's supposed to be going on?"

Heedless to all queries, the other rushed on:

"Already he is on his way. He will reach you before I can. If the carpet falls into his hands, the world is

doomed! You must guard it with your life! You must promise me—"

"Slow down, buddy." Brad was maddeningly calm. He even took time to chuckle at Eve's fidgetings. "Start off by telling me the angle on the carpet. Why should anyone want it? And what's this gag about the world being doomed if it falls into somebody or other's hands?"

"I cannot tell you!" Ranjit Saud expostulated. "You would not believe me. You must take my word—"

"Baloney. I don't take anyone's word for anything. Either you tell me or I hang up. Take your choice."

Silence, while seconds crept by on leaden feet. Then:

"Very well. I shall tell you. The rug of which I speak is the famed Flying Carpet of antiquity."

"The Flying Carpet!" Incredulity and a sudden note of irritation sprang into Brad's voice. "What are you talking about? You don't expect me to believe—"

"I told you that you would not believe me. It was too much to hope you would accept. So he will come and seize it, and civilization will go down—"

But now Eve interrupted:

"Who is 'he'? What does 'he' want with the carpet? Why—"

"Yes, I suppose you have a right to know." The caller was calmer now, but no less grimly earnest. "Perhaps, knowing him, you will even be more inclined to believe me. He—the man who seeks the carpet—"

Br-r-rac-ac-ac-ac!

The crackle of electrical interference slashed through the Oriental's words like a saw-toothed cutlass.

"**RANJIT SAUD!**" exclaimed Eve. "I can't hear you—"

The interference diminished, almost as if at her command. Three words

broke through to her straining ears, and to Brad's.

". . . the black dragon . . ." came the caller's voice. It sounded faint and distorted and very far away.

Br-r-rac-ac-ac-ac Brr-rz-rz-rz! Ac-ac! Ac-ac!

Again the interference! And this time it did not stop.

Frantically, Eve jiggled the 'phone's receiver hook.

"Operator! Operator!" she exclaimed desperately.

"What number are you calling, please?"

"I was talking to Baghdad, Iraq. There was interference and I was cut off—"

"One moment, please. I shall connect you with long distance."

Brad snorted his disgust. Slammed up the receiver.

"It's no use, Eve," he grunted, striding down the hall and through the doorway to her side. "With a war on, I'm surprised they gave us as much time as they did."

"I suppose so." She hung up her own receiver. "Long distance just keeps saying my call can't be completed now." A pause. Then, blue eyes dreamy: "I wonder what it all means, Brad . . . the Flying Carpet . . . the black dragon . . ."

"Mainly, it means a guy who calls himself Ranjit Saud is trying to pull a fast one," Brad answered with conviction. He dropped his big frame into a convenient chair, eyed Eve thoughtfully. "One of Dad's rugs must be worth more than we thought. So Mister Baghdad has figured himself a scheme to chisel us out of it."

"But no one would telephone all the way from Baghdad—"

"A crook would telephone from Mars, if there was loot enough involved."

"It can't be, Brad. He said the fate

of the world depended on saving the rug—”

HER companion shook his head. “It just won’t wash, Eve,” he declared. “After all, this is 1942. Flying carpets and black dragons are out of style. Besides, why should somebody in Baghdad suddenly get in a lather over civilization going to pot?” Again he shook his head, this time emphatically and with eyes narrowed. “No, sirree! Somebody’s doing a little sharp-shooting, with a wad of cash for a target.”

Eve’s eyes flashed and her red lips compressed in sudden irritation.

“That’s just the kind of remark I could expect from you, Brad King!” she snapped. “It takes a rich man’s son to be convinced that the whole world is made up of cheats and chisellers.” A momentary pause. “But you’re wrong! Plenty of people still have the decency to be unselfish. Right now, all over the world, millions of young fellows are proving it. They’re in the army, fighting to save their nations from totalitarianism. And if you were a man, instead of a spoiled brat, that’s where you’d be!”

The other chuckled. He met Eve’s angry blue eyes with an amused glance from his own brown orbs.

“Just because there’s a brawl in a bar where I’m having a drink doesn’t mean I have to do any slugging,” he retorted, shrugging. “If some dopes want to get their heads blown off, that’s their business. But don’t expect me to get enthusiastic about it.”

The red tide of anger rose in Eve’s smooth cheeks.

“You should be ashamed of yourself, Brad King!” she blazed furiously. “You draft-dodger! You slacker! You—oh, I can’t think of anything bad enough to call you!”

Brad merely chuckled again.

“After all, Eve, my heart’s bad!” he declared solemnly.

“It wasn’t too bad to play football all through college!” she slashed back at him. “It wasn’t too bad to go on canoe trips into the Canadian bush country! It wasn’t—”

“But the doctors—”

“Maybe the doctors would have felt differently if they’d known you were dosing yourself with drugs just to upset your heart action temporarily!”

But she could not wipe the mocking grin from his face.

“And some day you’re going to turn me in to the FBI,” he laughed. “You’ve told me so at least a hundred times now. Till you actually do it, though, why can’t we be friends?”

“I don’t want to be friends with a draft-dodger!” Eve flared, stamping her foot violently. “I’m ashamed for even living in the same house with you. And I promise you, the day my duties as co-executor of this estate are finished, I’m going to sign up as a nurse—”

Brad heaved himself from the seat into which he had slumped.

“Meantime, what do you say we go have a look at the room where Dad’s rugs are stored, my beloved?” he suggested, still grinning.

Again Eve stamped one small foot.

“I’m *not* your beloved!” she raged. “I wouldn’t have you—”

“—if I were the last man on earth,” Brad finished for her. “Come on!”

CHAPTER II

The Little Man Who Wasn’t There

THE storeroom the two young people sought was located in the farthest wing of Winthrop King’s vast, rambling country house. It was on the third floor.

"You could start half a dozen antique and curio joints with the stuff in this place," Brad explained as he unlocked the door. "There might be a whole carload of flying Persian carpets here, for all I know."

They peered inside.

The room was thick with dust and gloom. The hall's dim light revealed little to their straining eyes, save the vague shapes of the hundred-and-one ungainly pieces of furniture and odd bric-a-brac accumulated here down through the years. Over everything hung a queer, musty air.

"Junk enough for a salvage station," Brad grunted, stepping inside. He fumbled for the light switch; collided violently with a low-slung Turkish coffee table. "Ouch! Damn it, everything's got sharp corners!"

The next instant Eve—close behind—shoved hard against him. He stumbled further into the room.

"What the—"

"Shhh!"

Even as he turned, he caught a glimpse of the girl, momentarily silhouetted against the hallway's light. But only for an instant. Then the door was swinging tight shut, leaving them in utter, pitchy darkness, unable to so much as locate each other's faces.

A split-second later, Eve's hand brushed against Brad's arm. He caught her wrist.

"Hey, what's the idea—"

"Shhh!" Again the girl silenced him. And then, in the faintest of whispers: "Brad, I heard a noise! There's someone else in this room!"

"Baloney! Nothing but a mouse. The place is full of 'em—"

Yes even in his denial, the man lowered his voice to match hers.

"No! Listen!"

There was an undercurrent of urgency to Eve's words that held her com-

panion. Together, they stood for a moment in thickening silence.

C-r-r-r-e-e-e-k!

It was the sound of a floorboard giving under weight!

"**W**AS that a mouse?" hissed Eve tensely.

For answer, Brad's right hand shot out. He fumbled for the embossed hilt of a wickedly wave-edged yataghan he had noted resting on a nearby stand. Found it. Hefted the thirsty, razor-sharp blade.

"Brad! What are you doing?"

A grim smile played over young King's lips. He brought his head close to Eve's in the darkness.

"Drop flat when the light goes on!" he whispered.

The next instant he threw the switch.

A lone bulb flashed on in a ceiling socket. Simultaneously, Brad surged forward.

But he was not the only one who moved. In a far corner, half-hidden by a big Chinese screen, another figure erupted into action. Head down, face shadowy and unidentifiable, the man raced madly for the storeroom's second door, a heavy portal only a few feet from the screen that had been the intruder's hiding place.

"Hold it!" roared Brad. He, too, lunged for the door, yataghan raised.

The other reached the doorway. Whirled, a snub-nosed automatic gleaming dully in one hand. His other arm was raised to hide his face.

Brad caught the menace of the weapon's gleam. Flung himself sideways to the floor, heedless of smashed furniture and bruises. Even as he fell, he spotted a second gleam, centered on the intruder's chest. A 35 mm. camera!

The man with the gun blasted a single shot toward Brad. Missed by inches.

Then spun about and snapped a second slug, this time straight to the center of the ceiling light bulb.

The room went black, and a fraction of a second later the door against which the gunman had been standing slammed shut.

"Brad! Are you all right? Did he shoot you?"

It was Eve. At the sound of her anxious voice, young King chuckled, dragged himself painfully to his feet.

"What do you care?" he growled in mock anger. "You'd like to see me killed, wouldn't you? So what does it matter whether an Axis bullet or some thug does the job?"

"Oh!" Fury bubbled in the girl's retort like hell's broth in a witch's caldron. "Brad King, you're the most contemptible—"

Again her tormenter chuckled.

"Intra-household complaints should be in writing," he announced. "So how how about opening the door and letting some light in, or can you scribble in the dark?"

Still fuming, Eve did not condescend to answer him. But she did swing open the hall door.

BRAD limped into the next room, intent on getting a new light bulb and discovering what had become of their recent visitor. He found a window open.

"It's an easy drop from there to the veranda roof, and then to the ground," he explained to his lovely blonde companion when he returned with the light bulb. "By now, our pal is probably ten miles away and still driving fast."

Eve stared at him.

"Is that all you're going to say?" she demanded. "Aren't you going to do anything about it? Aren't you going to call the police?"

Her husky cousin shrugged, a half-

amused smile twisting his mouth.

"Why bother? The guy's gone, and it's a cinch we can't describe him for peanuts. Besides, the rug's the thing I'm interested in. It must be pretty hot stuff, to rate a burglar and a 'phone call from Baghdad the same night." He turned to a tall frame which stood tight against the wall next to the Chinese screen behind which the intruder had hidden. Long poles—partially covered with canvas casings—hung horizontally on the frame, like the rungs of a ladder. "Here are the carpets. Let's take a look at 'em."

Selecting one of the poles whose canvas wrapper was a little more than six feet long, he stripped it of the casing. Underneath, carefully wound around the roller, were half a dozen rugs, each approximately six feet square.

"Bad," he grunted. "I was hoping there'd only be one six-footer."

A frown wrinkled Eve's smooth forehead.

"Then how can we decide which one it is?" she asked worriedly. "Ranjit Saud didn't tell us much of anything, except that it was six feet square."

"He said it was Persian, but a screwy pattern." Brad stripped the first rug from the roller, tossing it across the top of the Chinese screen so that its pattern hung displayed before them. "I don't know much about oriental carpets, but maybe if we look at all of 'em, we'll get some kind of an idea."

BUT the pair's luck suddenly seemed to have played out. One by one, Brad draped the carpets, tapestry-like, across the screen. To the couple's inexperienced eyes, however, all looked much the same; they were beautiful in their shimmering, ageless colors, yes; but no one seemed outstandingly different from the rest.

"If only he'd told us whether it was

worn or not!" mourned Eve. "If he'd told us more about the pattern! Why, I don't even know what an 'arabesque design' is."

"Yeah." Brad scowled sourly. "I guess we'll just have to wait till Ranjit Saud gets here."

"And these are the only six-foot rugs your father had?"

"Right. These are all, except for a couple of shoddy imitations in the trunk over there." He led the way across the storeroom to a massive chest. Opened it and dragged forth a bright blue carpet. "See? It's three times the weight of the others. I can even tell it's a phoney myself."

And then, suddenly, he realized that Eve was not listening. Her blue eyes were distended, and the expression that welled deep within them was something closely akin to fear. She was staring, not at him nor the rug he held, but past him, back toward the section of the room from which they had come.

"What—" He started to speak.

The girl shook her head, as if shaking off some strange spell, and the blonde waves danced in the feeble glow of the ceiling bulb. Her hand touched Brad's arm; silenced him.

"Aren't there some more rugs in this trunk?" she asked inanely—for the lid was open, and it was obvious that there were not. But her voice was steady, as if it were the most natural question in the world. Her eyes, however, still stabbed at the spot from which they had come.

Brad turned slowly. Followed their glance.

Nothing was changed. The rack stood the same. So did the Chinese screen, draped over with rugs.

And then he caught it!

One of the rugs on the screen was *moving*! Ever so slowly, it was sliding back behind the screen! Yet none of

the other carpets went with it.

"Someone's pulling it over!" he grated beneath his breath. Simultaneously he moved toward where the yataghan still lay where it had fallen on the floor.

But before he could touch the wave-like blade, the screen came crashing forward, shoved out of balance by a ruthless hand. Behind it loomed the squat figure of the gunman who, but a few short minutes before, apparently had blasted his way from the room under cover of darkness. The automatic still gleamed in his right hand, while his left—again shielding his face—now gripped the oriental rug Brad had seen disappearing over the screen.

"Die, fool!" clipped the stranger in a cold, tight, accented voice. His finger tightened on the trigger.

THE next instant a blur of motion caught his eye. He swiveled to meet it from sheer reflex. Reeled backward as a brass jar hurtled through the air and smashed against his shoulder. Involuntarily his finger jerked the trigger the rest of the way back. The slug intended for Brad splattered into the ceiling.

"Brad! Help!"

Even as she screamed, Eve was stumbling forward, clutching for the gunman's arm.

"Aieee!" He snarled like a trapped animal, jerked backward savagely.

But the girl clung to his gun hand with the sudden strength of desperation.

"Brad!" she sobbed again. Reeled as the stranger lashed out at her lovely face with his free hand in a vicious blow.

Eyes blazing, teeth bared in a grimace of fury, Brad sprang to her aid, yataghan in hand. The other man saw him; twisted free with a final, desper-

ate lunge. Shoved Eve into the oncoming King's path. Raced for the hall door.

Brad stopped short. Sidestepped the falling girl. Charged after his adversary with a roar of anger.

The gunman reached the door bare feet ahead of Brad. His foot shot out. Kicked the low Turkish coffee table which stood beside the entryway squarely under young King's feet.

Brad went down with a crash. Sprawling on his face, he slid half across the hall. Staggered to his feet just in time to see his adversary disappear through a bedroom door a few feet farther down.

Heedless of peril, he lunged in pursuit, yataghan drawn back for action. Caught a glimpse of the man swinging out the window.

"A thirty-foot drop!" he gasped involuntarily. Leaped to the window himself.

Then he understood. A heavy rope had been lashed to the radiator. The intruder was sliding down it to safety. Already he was past the half-way mark.

Brad brought the yataghan down in a savage slash. Under its razor edge the rope parted like butter under a red-hot knife.

From below came a startled scream. Then the thud of a body landing heavily.

THE panting Brad looked out. On the ground sprawled the gunman, one leg twisted under him. For the first time King saw his hate-contorted face.

"A Jap!" he choked.

Crack!

Orange fire blasted from the other's automatic. A slug splintered the window pane dangerously close to the American's face. He jerked back; collided with Eve.

"Eve, girl! Are you all right? Did he hurt you?"

The girl managed a wan smile.

"I can still walk," she reported, "though I'll admit I probably wobble a little."

"Then come on!" Brad hurried toward the door. "Our pal is down in the yard with a broken leg. I'll get my deer rifle and we'll hold him for the law."

"I still can't see how he got behind that screen," Eve panted as they rushed down the stairs. "It's uncanny—"

"Baloney. It's just smart business." Brad sounded disgusted. "Because we heard the door slam after he dodged us the first time, we took it for granted he'd lammed. Which was just what he wanted us to think. Instead, he stayed right in the storeroom and ducked back behind the screen. And when he really wanted to leave, he went out that window up there, where he had a rope hanging ready for a quick getaway. If I hadn't happened to have that yataghan with me, we wouldn't have stood the chance of a snowball in hell of getting him."

Less than a minute later the two edged cautiously out into the yard, Brad carrying a deer rifle.

"Keep your head down, sister!" he warned Eve. "This guy's still got a gun, and he hasn't any scruples about using it."

Sticking deep in the shadows, the pair rounded the corner of the house.

The Jap no longer lay beneath the window!

"He's gone!" gasped Eve, wide-eyed.

HER companion nodded. "Right. But not far. Not with a pin twisted around like his was." He studied the grounds carefully for a moment, then trotted to the next corner of the building. An instant later his voice

rang out: "Hold it, Buddy!"

Crack!

Brad ducked back.

"He's out there, on the north side of the grounds," he informed Eve. "He won't get far, though." Raising the 30-30, he planted a copper-jacketed bullet into the lawn a couple of feet to the Nipponese' right, then called another command to surrender.

Crack-crack-crack!

Again the Americans ducked for cover.

"I don't get it," Brad grunted, his brow furrowed. "The guy must know he hasn't got a chance. Why does he keep on shooting?"

Eve squirmed forward. Almost instantly she gasped an exclamation.

"He's heading for the tool shed! Why would he do that, Brad?"

The other shrugged. "Don't ask me. Maybe he's got some cockeyed notion of making a stand there. It doesn't matter. Once he's in, he can't get out. It's got a concrete floor, brick walls, no windows, and only the one door. We'll keep him penned up there till the cops come." He jerked his head toward the house. "Go ahead. Call 'em."

He was still waiting when Eve returned, but the Japanese no longer was in sight. The tool shed's door was closed.

"He's in the tool shed," he explained. "I let him go."

Almost as he spoke, the shed door swung open. Instantly the American dropped flat, pulling the girl down with him. He frowned irritably.

"What's the guy up to now?" he muttered. "Does he think I'm going to let him come out again?"

Before Eve could answer, white light suddenly blazed from the shed's doorway. It came in a flash; was gone the same way.

"I don't like it!" grunted Brad. He drew a bead on the doorway's center. "There's something phoney about all this—"

AND then, from the tool shed, came the voice. A cold, tight voice with a faintly foreign accent.

"*Nahema kobal samiasa timour khan!*" the voice chanted. It was barely loud enough for them to hear from this distance. "*Nahema kobal samiasa timour khan!*"

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped. There was only silence, a silence somehow weirdly terrifying here in the blackness of night's shadows.

For a long minute the two young people lay staring at each other, their minds aflood with a thousand unanswerable questions. But Brad at last broke the spell. He came to his feet, big and powerful and grimly competent.

"I'm going to come up on that shed from the side and see what's going on," he announced. "This waiting is driving me nuts."

Eve watched him go, disappearing into the shadows like a wraith, using all the forest skill that a dozen trips into Canada's backwoods had given him. Then he was out in the open again, closing in on the shed from one side. Eventually charging through the open door with a savage rush. And a moment later he was shouting to her with stark panic in his voice. The girl ran to him.

Brad stood inside, the rifle clutched in white-knuckled hands. His feet were set wide apart, and his face was just a little pale, and his lips looked rough and dry. But it was his eyes that the girl noticed; there was utter incredulity in them—the incredulity of a man who fears his senses are failing him.

"Brad! What is it?"

His only answer was a sweeping gesture that took in the whole bare, brick-walled interior of the shed. And now it was Eve's turn to stare in shocked disbelief.

The shed was the same as always: a bleak altar to horticulture. The only thing changed was that the Persian carpet the Jap had stolen from the store-room now was spread on the floor here. But—

The Jap himself was gone!

CHAPTER III

The Best-Laid Schemes

"IT'S screwy," declared Brad dazedly. "It can't happen. To get out of this place without using the door is a physical impossibility. But that guy's gone! Like smoke up a chimney!"

Again Eve looked about.

"Maybe there's a trap door. Or the roof . . ."

"No." Her companion shook his head emphatically. "There's no getting around it, Eve; this place is fool-proof. Concrete floor, brick walls, a tight roof. No windows; only the one door."

Worry clouded her eyes. Thoughtfully, she smoothed her golden hair.

"There was that flash, though, Brad. And the chanting. Could they mean anything?"

The other shrugged. "Maybe. There's no way of telling." He moved to the shed's center, onto the rug, and turned his flashlight slowly, surveying every nook and cranny for the dozenth time. Eve joined him.

"What could that flash have been?" she persisted. "It was bright as day. And then it was gone again."

Her companion only repeated his earlier shrug.

"And why did he want this rug so badly?" the girl continued, her gaze falling to the ancient, tapestry-like carpet on which they both stood. "Certainly it's not attractive enough in itself to be worth the risk. Yet it seems certain that that man wasn't just a common burglar; he wanted this particular piece and nothing else."

"Right, he certainly did," Brad agreed dourly. "As to why he wanted it, you'd better ask your old chum, Ranjit Saud, about that. That is, unless even that call from Baghdad was just some kind of a gag—" He stopped short as the thought struck him. "Huh! That's an idea. Maybe the call was a phoney! Maybe the yellow belly we chased here was Ranjit Saud!"

"Oh, no!" Eve was positive. "I know it wasn't Ranjit Saud. It couldn't have been—"

"It couldn't? How come?"

"I just *know* it couldn't." And then, realizing how this sounded: "It's . . . it's my intuition—"

"And the cops will use ouija boards to find the guy!" Brad finished, grinning in spite of everything. "Lady, that's the jackpot!"

Eve flushed to the roots of her hair, and hastily changed the subject.

"Isn't the pattern strange?" she asked, nodding at the rug.

Brad followed her glance.

"Uh-huh. Looks more like a fancy geometry lesson than anything else. Just lines." His eyes narrowed. "Queer, too. It almost seems to move when you look at it for a while. The way the lines interlink—"

"They seem to vibrate," Eve shivered in agreement. "It's uncanny! I feel almost as if the whole pattern were moving."

TOGETHER, they studied the weird design, where triangles ran riot as

they chased parallelograms through interlinking circles. And while they watched, the whole pattern seemed to come to life, writhing and twisting like a monstrous serpent in a forest of lines.

"It's all so strange," said Eve. Her voice was but a whisper. "It frightens me, Brad—that Japanese, and the flash of light, and this carpet, and what Ranjit Saud said about the world's fate hanging on our judgment—"

Her companion's arm slipped about her waist.

"I know," he nodded, and suddenly all the jocularity and horseplay was gone out of him. He pressed her closer. "It's almost like a premonition of trouble coming; so many things we don't understand have happened, and that makes us wonder if something worse isn't just around the corner."

"It frightens me," the girl repeated.

"Of course. It scares me, too, for that matter. But don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to you. I'll promise you that." The man's big, competent hands gripped her. His lips brushed her hair. "Maybe I don't say enough about some things, Eve . . . I guess I'm sort of funny that way. But I think about them. For one thing, I know you saved my life tonight. That Jap would have plugged me sure if you hadn't grabbed his arm. I'm not forgetting it, youngster."

The girl seemed hardly to have heard him.

"It's all so strange," she said. "That chanting, too. What did he say, Brad?"

"It didn't make sense," Brad grunted. "The words weren't even in our language."

"But how did they go?"

"Let's see . . ." His brow furrowed as he racked his brain. "How was it—'nahema'—something or other, wasn't it? '*Nahema kobal samiasa*—'" Stumblingly, uncertainly, he muttered

the unfamiliar phrases—" '*Nahema kobal samiasa timour khan*—' "

And then, as if by magic, the world seemed to be exploding beneath their feet. The figures of the carpet were coming to life in a spinning, swirling, seething mass. They were no longer in a dimly-lighted tool shed. No! They were hurtling through space and time, infinitesimal atoms tossed through the infinity of the universe.

"Brad!"

Eve's scream was like the frightened cry of a child in the night. The man's arms clutched her tighter in his arms even as unconsciousness' murk blacked out his reeling brain . . .

It was on the camera, for some strange reason, that Brad's eyes focussed first. The lens seemed to leer down at him like a great, malevolent orb set in a black mask that was the leather case. At first it swam before him in swirling multiples. Then, as his brain cleared, it resolved itself from twelve to six, and then to three. And, finally, it hung motionless before him, a single miniature camera in a black leather case, suspended from a wall hook by a narrow strap.

ONLY then it was that the American suddenly realized it was daylight. He, himself, was sprawled flat on his back on the floor. Next he became aware of pressure and movement against his side. He turned slowly, painfully. Discovered that the thing he felt was a familiar golden head stirring uneasily against him.

"Eve!" he choked.

But the girl did not respond. Brad dragged himself to a sitting position, though the effort made his throbbing head spin like a top. He conquered the nausea that surged through him. Turned to stare at his surroundings.

He was sitting on the floor at one end

of a large room. And what a room! He had never seen its like before. The walls were of some strange, translucent material. Probably a plastic, he decided. Every available surface was covered with a mass of intricate traceries, obviously of oriental—probably Arabic or Persian—origin. There were several closed doors, all of the same material as the walls, while one side was lined with high arched windows. Beside him, on the floor, lay this deer rifle and flashlight. Otherwise—save for the camera and a coat and hat hanging from the hooks on one wall—the place was completely barren of any furnishing.

Staggering to his feet, young King lurched to the nearest window. He peered out, then started back in amazement.

The building in which he stood rose high above its neighbors. All about it, as far as he could see, stretched an endless sea of human habitations, a vast city the like of which he had never seen before. Every size, every shape, every color—its structures shared only one thing: all followed vaguely a peculiar, semi-oriental style of architecture. Yet it was impossible to place the school definitely; it had been shaded and modified and corrupted until it was neither Moorish nor Egyptian, Persian nor Arabic, Indian nor Chinese—and still, nevertheless, queerly assorted elements of all were present.

"Ah! You are conscious!"

It was a voice Brad had heard before. A cold, tight, guttural voice with a faintly foreign accent. The same harsh voice that had chanted eerily that night from the tool shed . . .

Brad whirled. Behind him, across the room, stood the Japanese gunman. His hand still gripped the knob of the door through which he had come so silently. A short, squat man he was,

saffron-hued and incredibly ugly. His clothes were occidental-grey trousers, and a white shirt with blue necktie. The sleeves were rolled up above his elbows. He stared at the young American with beady, jet-black eyes. Stained, uneven teeth were bared in a smirking smile that shot his yellow face with mummy-like wrinkles. But the grimace conveyed no welcome; only sly, sinister menace.

"We meet again!" he gloated. "It is good. This time you shall learn respect, you pig!"

BRAD felt the great muscles across his neck and shoulders grow taut with resentment. His jaw hardened.

"I doubt it," he grated.

Eve suddenly jerked bolt upright.

"Where am I?" she gasped, eyes fear-distended. "Brad! What happened?"

Then, as quickly as she had straightened, she started to crumple. But King sprang to her side. He caught her. Steadied her until her head had time to clear.

Across the room, the Jap's jet eyes glittered.

"Ah! The lady, also, is awake!" He rubbed broad-palmed, stubby-fingered hands together. Chuckled unpleasantly. "Such a charming guest—"

The girl clung to Brad's hand.

"I don't understand," she quavered. "What happened? Where are we?"

"Yes, what's the angle?" Brad echoed. "Just what do you think you're going to pull?"

The yellow man gave vent to a mirthless guffaw. The sound sent chills through the others' veins.

"What am I going to pull?" he mimicked. "You should ask, you fools! Your whole western civilization soon will crash in ruins! Your weaklings' democracy will disappear! And the credit shall be mine! All mine! Nippon

will honor me, Doctor Kikujiro Mitsui, beside the emperor himself! My fame shall endure through a thousand generations—"

As one, in mute, horrified fascination, the young people stared at him.

"The guy's nuts!" muttered Brad.

The other caught his words.

"You think I am mad? Fool! It is you who are mad, not I. Last night, you could have killed me. You had a gun. I lay helpless. But you let me live, and now your people shall be slaves of mine through all eternity in penalty for it! Because you were weak, I live to destroy your whole world!"

THERE was something obscene in the gleeful gloatings of the Nipponese. That, and something terribly menacing. Something that made the Americans repress shivers with an effort at his words.

"Your western science!" sneered Doctor Mitsui. "Your vaunted progress! Your smug intellectuals! They have laughed at us, all of them. They have called our wisdom superstition, and our scholars sorcerers.

"But now we shall show them! The East again shall have its day! Let the fools scoff. The geomancy that they sneered at shall be their doom—"

"Geomancy?" Brad interrupted. He looked puzzled. "Maybe my education's been neglected, but I never heard of it. What is it, anyhow?"

The Oriental turned on him in amazement.

"Are you not the son of Winthrop King?"

"Sure. Of course. But what's that got to do with this geomancy business?"

"Your father was an occultist. I met him once, many years ago, in Bhutan.*

* Bhutan is a tiny, British-controlled state lying between India and Tibet. It is famed as a stronghold of the Black Arts.—Ed.

He understood much of Asia's wisdom. Did he never teach you his lore?"

Young King shook his head.

"Sorry, Doc. Nary a lore."

The Jap silenced him with a peremptory gesture.

"I shall try to explain. Most, you will not be able to understand. But some, even your feeble occidental brains might grasp."

The words in themselves were an insult; the yellow man's arrogance made them a slap in the face. Brad's eyes blazed. But he thought of Eve and forced himself to hold his peace.

"Talk's cheap," he commented sourly. "Suppose you let us find out for ourselves whether our 'feeble occidental brains' can take it."

Doctor Mitsui ignored the sarcasm. Again his lips parted in the ugly grin which so often characterized him.

"Geomancy," he announced in the precise tone of a university lecturer beginning a class, "is what you call magic. The magic of lines and figures and signs and symbols. Ten thousand years and more, men have studied them and meditated on them and experimented with them. They found that some patterns had strange powers. That with them they could do the impossible . . ."

An indescribable auro of evil seemed to grow around the Nipponese as he talked. His nostrils flared, his slant eyes gleamed. He bared his stained, misshapen teeth in a gloating grimace of triumph, while Brad and Eve sat rigid and tense, an unnamable fear touching their hearts with icy fingers.

". . . One pattern they found more powerful than all the rest," the Jap continued. "One design stronger than any other. It would do more than work spells. It would carry them out of this world, to the others which lie parallel with it—"

"To what other worlds?" gaped Brad.

THE other's cold gaze dripped contempt.

"To the parallel worlds," he repeated.

"To the infinite worlds of 'if'."

"I don't get it. What are you talking about?"

"Of course you do not understand."

The doctor laughed harshly. "It was too much to expect that you would. I shall try to simplify the concept.

"We think of this sphere as being one world. It is not. No; we share it with untold numbers of other worlds. Worlds which might have been. They are infinite. Each time some event could have had two outcomes, a new world of 'if'—a parallel world—is created. And within that world the same thing happens. Last night, for example: You could have shot me, but you did not. And so another world was created—a world in which you *did* shoot me, thus changing the whole course of history."

The two young people before him stared at each other blankly, then back at Mitsui.

"I guess we're just too stupid," grunted Brad caustically. "It makes no sense to me."

"Yes." Eve nodded her agreement.

"And then . . . there's so much you don't explain . . . the Flying Carpet that Ranjit Saud talked about . . ."

"Fools! How do you think the geomantic pattern that links the parallel worlds has been preserved through the ages? It is the Flying Carpet of the legends! The same carpet Winthrop King so long kept hidden in his store-room! And how it flies! Not through the air, as the fairy tales had it; but even more miraculously—through the infinite worlds of 'if'."

"So you stole it—" began Brad. But the sidelong glance he threw to Eve said: "Mad! Stark, staring mad!"

"Yes. I stole it. After twenty years of searching, I found it and I stole it—"

Brad's eyes were on his deer rifle, still lying close by on the floor where it had fallen.

The doctor was chuckling evilly. "And then fortune smiled on me. By accident, you followed me here. You, knowing nothing, made the trip any wizard in the world would sell his soul to take! You came to me here, where I can revenge myself upon you fittingly." His voice grew shrill with hatred. "You shall watch me, both of you, as I destroy your country, your civilization, the whole world you knew!"

Brad lunged for the rifle.

"No! Stand back, fool, or I kill you now!"

The American's hands closed around the weapon. He started to swivel.

BUT MITSUI'S hand already had flashed down. Now it was whipping up again. The stubby fingers were wrapped around the butt of the automatic he had carried the night before. His body was turned more than when he had been talking; it revealed a hip holster.

Brad stopped short.

"You think that even for one second I trusted you?" the Jap sneered, his ugly face aflame with hatred. "You think I was not watching you?" He glared. "Now drop that gun!"

"No dice." The other made no move to relinquish the weapon. "I've got you dead to rights, Doc. You can shoot me, all right. But before I drop over, I can shoot you, too. That leaves Eve in the clear. So you might as well give up."

The Jap's lips pursed in a shrill, sudden whistle.

"What—"

The door burst open. Two men charged in.

What men they were! Six feet tall they stood—six feet apiece of Mongo-

loid bone and muscle. Their bullet heads were shaven, their flat yellow faces hard and cruel. They wore only sleeveless, collarless leather jerkins over their bare, thickthewed torsos. Broad leather belts—each with a short scimitar hanging from it—secured long, loose trousers. Their feet were shod with heavy sandals.

Now they stood beside the door, their chill, obsidian eyes on Doctor Mitsui. He spoke to them in a queer, guttural tongue, his own jet orbs wicked in their intensity, his lips twisted in a savage grin.

Instantly the pair turned. Like giant, dangerous jungle cats, they moved toward Brad.

"You have your choice," purred Mitsui. "You may lay down the rifle now. Or you may wait until these friends of mine reach you. But if you wait, I have ordered them to break your arms as they take the gun away!"

For one brief moment Brad hesitated. His eyes took in the doctor's automatic. The oncoming Mongols, with their hungry fingers and merciless faces. And Eve, her pale face horror-straight as she shrank back from the monsters.

"This hand is yours," he said at last. "You've got all the cards. Call off your pals."

The rifle clattered on the floor.

CHAPTER IV

The World of Timour Khan

THE weapon's fall was like a signal gong. Both of the Mongoloid creatures halted, disappointment plainly written in their broad, brutal faces. They turned expectantly to Doctor Mitsui, as if awaiting further orders.

The Japanese relaxed, grinning wolfishly.

"You are wiser than I thought," he

chuckled. "I would have wagered you would play the stubborn fool, no matter at what cost."

"All right, so I fooled you," Brad grunted. "What does that add up to? What happens next?"

"First, I have work to do." The other was gloating. "Important work." Returning his automatic to its holster, he clipped an order to his minions, then turned and left the room through the doorway by which he had entered. He walked with a decided limp.

"At least, he had to pay something for that rug," Brad remarked to Eve. "That leg of his must be pretty badly banged up from the fall."

The girl nodded, but her eyes did not leave the two Mongols.

"Where are we, Brad?" she asked. "Who are these men? Is it true, what that Jap says? Are we really in the parallel worlds he talked about? What do you think he's going to do with us—" There was a little tremor in her voice. Her face was pale, her blue eyes anxious.

Her companion shrugged.

"Sorry, Eve. I never did rate as a quiz kid. Right now, I don't know any more than you do. At first, I figured the doc was just nuts. Now, I don't know. But it's a cinch we're a long way from where we started." He jerked his head in the direction of the windows. "Take a gander. That town outside isn't Hackensack. And I never saw guys like this pair"—he nodded toward their guards—"strolling around Sioux Falls."

"But the things he threatens—" The girl shuddered. "The way he talks about destroying our civilization; and about how the Japanese will have the whole white race as their slaves—"

"I wouldn't worry too much about that part. After all, it's one thing to chatter about it, another to do the job. And even if we are in those screwy par-

allel worlds he talks about, I can't see where it would make any difference to the rest of the universe."

"Dolt!"

THE Americans jerked around to face the speaker. It was Doctor Mitsui. He stood in the open doorway.

"You are even more stupid than I thought," he rasped. "No wonder Nippon's armies have triumphed over yours in every conflict! It is a wonder the emperor's forces are not in Washington already. And now, with my aid, there will be no stopping us—"

"I'm still curious," baited Brad. "It's great stuff for you to stand there and shoot off your mouth about what you're going to do to the U. S. A., but it'll take some proving to me. Every time your boys have met ours with the odds half-way even, you've bogged down like cows in a quagmire. Look at the time you had at Wake Island, let alone the Philippines! And when we moved in on the Solomons—"

"And so, never again shall the odds be even!"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

The Jap was almost slaving with rage. He was breathing hard.

"I am answering your questions, you fool!" he snarled. "I am telling you that never again shall the odds be even. No! For now, the infinite manpower of the parallel worlds is ours! Their legions will march beside us." He gestured toward the two Mongol guards. "Beasts like these—millions of them! More than there are sands in the sea. They will pour from this world of theirs to ours like the hordes of Attila the Hun. Nothing can withstand them! How can we lose battles when we can throw more men into the struggle than our enemy has rounds of ammunition?"

In paralyzed horror the two young people listened, spellbound by the awful

prospect the other unfolded. Even after he paused to gloat, they sat in shocked silence.

"For twenty years I have sought that carpet!" cried the doctor. "Twenty years, up and down the world, from Cairo to Cambodia, and Lhasa to Lahore. A hundred times I thought I had it, and yet each time it slipped away. A dozen times I would have given up; but always my brothers of the Black Dragon urged me on—"

"The Black Dragon!"

The Jap stopped short at the chorused exclamation.

"Yes. The all-powerful Society of the Black Dragon, that guides the destinies of Japan. Others may weaken, but never we—" On he raved, and on, gushing forth a fanatic's creed of hate.

The Americans looked at each other.

"I get it, now," said Brad. "It was the Black Dragon Society your pal Ranjit Saud was trying to warn us against on the 'phone."

Eve nodded.

"Yes. I've heard of them, too. There was a newspaper article once . . ."

Her companion turned back to the Nipponese.

"Quite a yarn," he announced with a blandness he was far from feeling. "If I remember, though, the Flying Carpet is spread across the floor of a tool shed back in our own world. So I don't quite see how you're going to transport any armies back and forth from one world to another. Or are you rigging up some new kind of escalator for the job?"

Doctor Mitsui was unperturbed.

"Come!" he commanded. "I shall show you I am no foolish occidental. Long before I ever located the rug, I had worked out a plan for carrying its pattern with me."

TURNING, he led the way through the door. The Americans scram-

bled to their feet and followed, the Mongols at their heels.

The room in which they found themselves was pitch black. Then there was a clicking noise and, above them, a queer, opalescent globe began to glow. In a matter of seconds the entire chamber was softly lighted.

Save for the opaqueness of the walls, this room was much similar to the other, though smaller. Here, however, there were furnishings. A long table stood in the center. On it were arrayed a number of tray- and beaker-like vessels, while at one end stood a strange device which looked for all the world like a giant photographic enlarger, were such to be made of plastics instead of wood and metal.

Doctor Mitsui leered at the two young people.

"Does my technique become obvious to you at last?" he queried sarcastically.

A great dawn of understanding was breaking in Brad's eyes.

"That 35 millimeter miniature camera!" he exclaimed excitedly. "That's the reason you headed for the tool shed like a homing pigeon! I remember seeing it on you while I was scrapping with you in the storeroom last night. As soon as you got into the shed, you must have spread the rug out on the floor, then climbed up on stepladder or something and made some shots of it—"

"Of course!" broke in Eve. "Don't you see, Brad? That explains the flash of light we saw, too. It was a photographic flashbulb—"

The Japanese bowed mockingly, a death's-head grin pasted across his ugly yellow face.

"Correct!" he clipped. "With me, I carried a complete set of necessary photographic chemicals. Already I have developed the film, directed the construction of a crude enlarger, and made an enlargement of the Flying Carpet's

pattern. In but a few minutes it will be ready for use." As he spoke, he walked over to the far end of the table, where a shallow plastic tray at least four feet square lay, and removed a dripping enlargement from it. Every line stood out as sharp and clear as in the carpet from which it had been copied. "You see?" he chuckled. "It is perfect. With this to aid me, there is no limit to the armies I can transport to Nippon's battlefronts. At last our victory is assured—"

"Providing, that is, that your pals in this world like the idea of being used for cannon fodder," commented Brad. "Did you ever consider that angle, Doc? That these people might object to stooging for Hirohito? Why, they might even take it into their heads that the United Nations were a better bet than Japan. Then where would you be?"

BUT even as he said it, Brad knew he was whistling in the dark. And he knew that Mitsui knew it. At first, the young American actually had doubted his captor's sanity; had refused to believe that such things as those the Japanese described could be.

Now, though, it was different. Mitsui was a fanatic, yes. But he was sane, and this scheme of his—wild and weird as it might seem—was dangerously logical, once you granted his fundamental premise of the existence of the strange worlds of "if."

"Do you actually ask such questions seriously?" queried the doctor. "Or is it that you merely try to postpone your fate by bringing up all the stupidity in your feeble brain?"

Even now, Brad winced under the yellow man's contempt.

"What do you mean, stupidity?" he snapped. "And as far as our fates are concerned, this is the first you've mentioned 'em. What's the matter? Are

you afraid to answer the questions I asked?"

"You, the son of an occultist!" the Oriental jeered.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Have you never heard of clairvoyance? Do you think the crystal ball is only the stock-in-trade of fortune-telling charlatans?"

"For years I have been in contact with Timour Khan, the monarch of this world. Our minds long since bridged the gap our bodies were unable to pass. We thought out every detail, laid our plans for the day when I should at last find the rug which would enable us to meet face to face. And we planned well, Timour Khan and I—"

"Just who is this Timour Khan?"

"Timour Khan?" The Jap gave vent to a guttural chuckle that sent chills racing up and down the others' spines. Triumph and vindictive glee gleamed in his jet eyes. "He rules this world—"

"But—"

"He rules this world," Doctor Mitsui repeated. "This world, the world that might have been had not Genghis Khan's son, Ogdai, died at Karakorum in 1246."

"Ogdai?" Brad said slowly. He frowned. "If I remember right, Genghis Khan and his family conquered all of Europe they wanted. But I don't recall Ogdai."

"It was under Ogdai that the Mongols' gains in the west were consolidated," explained the doctor, smiling unpleasantly. "But when he died, his heirs felt Europe was not worth holding. At last they withdrew. But they were never defeated. They left Europe because they wanted to leave, not because they had to."

"But if Ogdai had lived—ah, that would have been a different story!" The squat man's jet eyes flashed fire. "The Mongols would not have with-

drawn. No. They would have stayed on, and extended their conquests to Italy and Spain and Britain and Africa and the north. They would have held the whole known world until America was discovered, and then they would have gained your western hemisphere, too. They would have reigned triumphant down through a thousand years and more. The world would have been a Mongol world, a world with white slaves instead of yellow."

FANATICISM rang in the Oriental's voice. His ugly face glowed with the flame that burned within him. The stained, uneven teeth gleamed dully in a horrible grimace of triumph. Feet spread wide apart, he stood between and just in front of the two Mongols. They flanked him like brutal bronze statues, arms folded, bullet heads erect, faces expressionless.

And before them all, facing them, stood the two Americans, their faces white and drawn as they tried to hide the fear they needs must feel.

"That is the world we are in!" cried Doctor Mitsui. "Here live the descendants of the Mongol conquerors. A race of yellow men who have never known defeat. And now they long again to ride forth to battle beneath the banner of their lord and ruler, Timour Khan!"

There was silence, then—tense, grim silence, while the Japanese gloated, and young Brad King met the stare with hard-pawed, stiff-necked defiance.

The spell was broken by the clang of a brazen gong. It rang through the chambers in vibrant echoes, like the very knell of doom.

Doctor Mitsui jerked as if an electric shock had jolted through him. He whirled on the flanking Mongols. Jabbered to them excitedly. They responded in kind.

The Jap turned back to his captives, eyes gleaming.

"You heard it?" he demanded. "It was the summons! It calls me to the court of Timour Khan!" Hastily, he began rolling up the still-wet enlargement of the Flying Carpet's pattern. "Timour will see this copy now," he told them. "When he sees it, his last doubts will vanish. His aid will be assured. Before night falls, his warriors will be on the march!"

The Americans said nothing.

"And you . . ." leered the yellow man. "I shall take you with me. You, too, shall meet Timour. In you, he shall see the weakness and decadence of your western democracy personified. After that . . . who can tell? Perhaps it will amuse him to watch you die!"

CHAPTER V

One Bad Turn . . .

IT WAS a scene from the Arabian Nights. Or a nightmare.

Before them, as they entered the great central square, stood the dais of Timour Khan, glistening in the morning sunlight like a mountain of golden mirrors. Tier upon tier it rose, Babylon's hanging gardens and more, set down in the heart of an impossible metropolis of maybe. Around its base, barbarically resplendent, thronged the Khan's teeming multitude of subjects: men, women and children alike, gathered from squalor and splendor to pay homage to their ruler and to hear him judge their deeds. Bigger than their forefathers they were, for the end of nomadic life and the advent of higher living standards, generation on generation, had made of them a stronger, taller race. Only their skins and their flat, Mongoloid faces remained as external reminders of their origin.

And here and there among them, too, were the conquered whites: stooped, heavy-laden beasts of burden; men reduced to animal status by a hundred generations of servitude. They hurried about their tasks in frightened silence, gaunt bodies showing through the rags they wore.

The trio approached the dais. The two guards brought up their rear. Ahead, a thousand grim-faced Mongol soldiers—scimitars in hand—lined the shining stairway that led to the foot of the canopied throne crowning the summit.

Slowly, the three mounted the stairs.

Now they could better see the man who sprawled upon the throne, and the others who surrounded him.

It was easy to interpret the expressions on these others' faces. They were cringing, all of them. The groveling respect they showed was but another name for abject fear.

As for their ruler—

He was a big man, even among these six-foot giants. Bulging muscles stretched his skin. Muscles, and incredible fat for great, blubbery rolls overflowed the mighty throne. It was as if Gargantua were to seat himself on a camp stool.

He wore loose trousers, like his men, but of a material far richer, while from his shoulders hung a purple robe that shimmered like moonlight on the water. It was open in front, revealing him naked to the waist. He wore no ornaments save a gold-link belt in which was thrust a jewel-encrusted dagger.

BUT it was neither body nor apparel that the visitors noticed.

For the Mongol's face drew their eyes like a magnet. A fat face, below a shaven, bullet-shaped cranium. The jowls hung loose and heavy, and the yellow skin glistened greasily. Two slickly

ropish mustaches drooped—one on either side of his mouth—to six inches beneath his chin. Black, wicked eyes peered sleepily from under leaden lids. At the moment a whimsical, half-amused smile played about his lips, while with fat fingers he tugged indolently at his right mustache.

It was a strange face; one hard to analyze. There were no harsh character lines by which to judge, the fat had swallowed them up. Even the eyes gave little hint—one man might have called them mischievous, another vicious.

And yet, withal the Mongol radiated a sense of power, good or evil though it might be. Brad tried to place it. Half-decided it was the unusual combination of corpulence and muscularity of fat with strength. Then shrugged and gave it up as a bad job.

Fanatic triumph shone in Doctor Mitsui's face as he and the two Americans approached the throne.

"Timour Khan!" he rasped, his voice a hoarse whisper. His tone was almost reverent.

The ruler paid them no heed. He continued to deal with those of his own kind who surrounded him.

Now a white man was dragged before him. A pitiful, panic-stricken creature that whimpered like a beaten dog. One of the Mongols gestured toward him, then snarled half-a-dozen guttural syllables to the monarch.

Timour Khan stared at the white man sleepily, still smiling. He mumbled a few querying phrases.

The man before him replied tremulously.

The ruler gestured for the other to come forward.

Hesitatingly, the white man obeyed, until at last he stood on the same level with Timour Khan, and less than a step distant.

The smile was still pasted on the Mongol's face as he reached out his left hand. His fingers closed on the white man's arm. Drew him even closer, with a confidential air.

And then, suddenly, the Asiatic's right hand was flashing down to his belt. Down, and up, now with the jewel-encrusted dagger clutched tight. With a flash of reflected sunlight its point stabbed home. Its keen blade ripped through the tender, quivering flesh of the white man's belly in a savage slash that opened his abdomen from pelvis to breastbone.

A scream of agony rent the air. The white man jerked back spasmodically. His hands clutched at the gaping, awful wound.

TIMOUR KHAN'S fat face twisted in a grimace of sadistic joy. All at once there was no question as to the correct interpretation of that strange expression he wore. Eyes, mouth, lines—all told the same vicious story: cruelty, savage and insenate—that, and that alone, was the key to his character.

Now, as the dying white man tottered, the Khan's foot shot out. Caught the other in the groin. Sent him plunging backward down the long stairway, head over heels, in a spray of blood and guts.

"Brad!" Eve screamed, face horror-lined. She staggered; retched.

King caught her in his arms. His own face was pale with nausea, but he fought it down.

"Hold it, Eve!" he grated. "Don't blow your top. Our chances are slim enough now. Keep your chin up, lady!"

Even as he spoke, Timour Khan was turning his attention to them. He spoke to Doctor Mitsui.

"A thousand welcomes, Doctor.



A city magically appeared; a city of another world

My empire is at your feet."

Eve, her face buried against her companion's shoulder as she sobbed uncontrollably, paid no heed. But Brad, himself, was unable to repress a start of amazement.

The syllables Timour Khan pronounced were meaningless to him—yet the thought was as clear as the noon-day sun overhead!

Then Doctor Mitsui was replying. He, too, spoke an alien tongue. But the American found himself understanding every word of it!

The Jap caught the expression of bewilderment as he concluded his own ceremonious greeting to the Khan. He smiled mirthlessly.

"When minds as well trained in dark mysteries as are ours meet, language means nothing," he commented. "We speak only to give each other a point of concentration on which to focus. Were it necessary, we could understand as well without even opening our mouths. And so powerful are our minds that even feeble brains like yours cannot but grasp the meaning."

But now Timour Khan was staring at the two Americans suspiciously.

"What are these white dogs doing here?" he demanded ferociously.

Mitsui beamed.

"These fools are prisoners, oh khan of khans," he reported. "It is against their kind that we war in my world. These two tried to stop me when I came for the pattern which we sought. So I brought them with me as gifts to you. I thought that perhaps they might provide some small amusement for you . . ."

"Indeed," the other nodded. "But first we must think of other things . . . of war, of power, of conquest—"

"It is but right that first things come first," bowed the Jap approvingly.

"Then you have the pattern? You brought the copy with you successfully across the worlds?" There was a grim, deadly intensity to the Mongol's voice. Blood-lust's fever stirred him from his sloth. He hunched forward on his throne, a gross, barbarous monster.

Doctor Mitsui bowed low.

"I have the pattern. A perfect copy. Enlarge it still further, and it will give us a getaway between our worlds large enough to march an army through—" He drew the rolled-up print from beneath his arm. Displayed it, spread out, to Timour Khan. "You see? Every line, every detail—"

BRAD suddenly became aware that Eve no longer was sobbing. She had raised her head from his shoulder. Was staring up at the Mongol ruler and his Japanese associate.

Her companion touched her shoulder in a rough caress.

"Feeling better?" he asked. "I know it was pretty horrible, but I hope you're not going to let it get you down. After all . . ."

But the girl was not listening to him. She was looking past him, on up the dais to where Timour Khan and Doctor Mitsui still consulted.

"That Japanese *isn't* insane, Brad," she whispered. "He's meant it, every word he said. And it's true; He's going to wreck our kind of civilization. To make us all slaves. I didn't believe it. I thought he was crazy, too. But now . . . now I've seen this world, and that monster, Timour Khan—"

She choked back a sob. Her voice was rising as she spoke, and a little note of hysteria had crept into it. Brad caught it. He gripped her arms.

"Snap out of it, Eve. There's nothing we can do, except jump out of the frying pan into the fire. If we keep

our nerve, there's always a chance we'll get a break—"

"But what about the world? What about Doctor Mitsui, and his plan to use Timour Khan's men against the United Nations?" Eve held her voice lower now, but there was a fierce, dangerously stubborn note in it.

Brad shrugged.

"It's tough," he admitted. "Nevertheless, we'll just be sticking our own necks under the axe if we try anything. And after what happened to that guy the Khan worked over, I don't want any part in this deal."

The girl turned on him, eyes flashing blue fire. Her lovely lips were pale but firm.

"You coward!" she slashed. "Don't you ever think of anything except your own precious life? Would you buy your own safety with the whole world's freedom?" The corners of her mouth twisted sardonically. "No wonder you were anxious to keep out of the draft! All along, I hoped you'd prove me wrong about that. That I'd find you were misled, instead of afraid. But no! You're yellow, Brad King! That's all that's wrong with you—"

"You little fool!" grated Brad. He shook her. "Don't you understand? Haven't you any sense at all? Can't you see that we can't do anything now—"

"Those two yellow fiends are within twenty feet of us. They've got the geomantic pattern that can destroy our world. Are you going to let them?"

"But—"

"Coward!"

With a sudden, violent jerk, Eve tore herself free of Brad's restraining hands. Leaped toward the dais where stood Mitsui and Timour Khan, golden hair streaming behind her as she ran.

"I'll show you!" she cried. "Watch me, Brad King!"

"Come back here, you little idiot!" roared Brad. He sprang after her frantically.

FOR the barest fraction of a second, the Mongol warriors who lined either side of the stairway stood in stupefied, open-mouthed awe. But the next instant they had recovered their wits. Like ravening wolves, they lunged for the two Americans.

Already Eve was on the dais. But clutching hands clawed at her, shredded her dress to ribbons. Sobbing with anger, she tore loose. Then another of the guards caught her about the waist in a grip of iron. She struggled. Could not budge.

Behind her, Brad slashed through his adversaries in a savage line drive that would have brought joy to any professional football coach's heart. Then came up short as half a dozen of the Mongols dragged him down.

But he was nearly abreast Eve. With one final surge of strength, he threw off his opponents. His left hand closed on the shoulder of the man who held Eve. His right doubled into a fist. Smashed home on the soldier's out-thrust jaw. Even as he felt the blow connect, he himself went under, a wave of guards atop him.

In front of Brad, the expression went out of the slugged soldier's eyes. The man's head snapped back. His knees turned to water and his muscles went slack. Eve felt the arms around her waist relax. At the same moment she saw that Mitsui and Timour Khan had whirled to watch the struggle. Each was gripping the print of the Flying Carpet with one hand.

The girl flung herself headlong. Her hands reached out. Gripped the precious photograph. She heard the rattle of it as it tore. Then the sound was drowned out by Timour Khan's bull

voice roaring, and her head was spinning from a well-placed buffet . . .

Mongol guards dragged the two Americans forward to the dais again a minute later. The pair were still stunned and reeling. Timour Khan, the photo gripped in his pudgy hands, favored them with a wolfish grin.

"The pattern is torn, but not too badly," he informed them, waving the print with one hand while he tugged at his mustaches with the other. "It can be repaired."

"Not that it would matter much if it couldn't," Brad shrugged. "After all, that's just a print, and your pal, Mitsui, has got the negative, so he could make up another."

"Of course," beamed the doctor. "I am surprised you did not think of it before your so foolish attempt—"

WIDE-EYED, Eve twisted to face her companion.

"Brad! You mean . . . you knew . . ."

"Of course." He shrugged again. "Forget it, though. What's done's done."

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"It seemed sort of obvious." King forced a grin. "I took it for granted you'd know a picture has a positive and a negative. And then"—another grin—"you didn't give me too much chance."

"Brad! Oh, Brad! I've been such a fool!" Tears were streaming down the girl's face. "I was so angry I stopped thinking . . . and now there's nothing we can do. . . ."

"Forget it," he repeated. "We all make mistakes."

"Indeed we do," bowed Doctor Mitsui, his ugly face wrinkled with a satanic smile. "This mistake, I believe, will be the last for both of you."

He turned to Timour Khan.

"May I enquire your plans for these

two crawling dogs? My people are skilled in tortures. Perhaps I could suggest certain measures—?"

"Perhaps. For the man."

The Jap raised his eyebrows.

"And for the woman?"

A greasy smile came over the Mongol's fat face. His black eyes were fixed on Eve, and suddenly she was acutely conscious of the tears in her dress.

"The woman?" The way Timour Khan said it made the phrase a leper's caress. "The woman? Why, I like a spirited woman. It pleases me to tame them . . ." He licked his lips. "Yes, there is always a place among my concubines for a woman with fire in her veins."

"Brad!" Eve was crying and shuddering at once. "Oh, Brad, not that! Don't let them—"

King stood tight-lipped and rigid beside her. But he did not try to move. Not with both his arms gripped in hammerlocks by the Mongols behind him.

"Excellent!" approved the Japanese. "Most excellent! No torture could be more exquisite for this woman." He paused. "But now, may we not return to our plans for war in my world—"

"Yes. The plans." Timour Khan turned to one of his aides, mumbling instructions and handing him the torn photograph.

"The invasion must come soon," declared Doctor Mitsui. "Already Nippon's reserves are nearly used up—"

IT WAS then that the Mongol laughed. He threw back his head and roared until the rolls of fat that clothed his great body shook as if it were a living, separate organism.

"Yes?" the Jap queried politely. He looked puzzled, as if unable to figure out this outburst. And then, continuing: "Perhaps even tonight the march could begin—"

"You fool!" said Timour Khan.

Doctor Mitsui stopped short. Bristled, jet eyes flashing.

"What did you say?"

"I said you were a fool!" sneered the Mongol. "I said it, and you are. For I shall invade your world, yes; but I shall invade it for myself, not as the blundering tool of your stupid nation."

"I do not believe I understand," the Nipponese murmured very softly, very silkily. "If you would please to explain. . . ."

"What is there to explain? You, yourself, found for me the pattern to take me to your world. Now I have it, so I need you no more."

"Ai!"

It was a snarl of rage, torn from the depths of Mitsui's throat by overwhelming emotion. Even as it burst from his lips, his hand was streaking down . . . snatching his automatic from the hip holster.

Thwack!

The Jap crumpled to the platform of the dais, moaning, while one of the Mongols kicked the automatic out of reach and grinned lovingly down at the club with which he had knocked out the Nipponese.

And still Timour Khan laughed.

"All down through the years you have thought I was a stumbling, stupid fool!" he cried. "I, who murdered my own brother to gain this throne! Yet always you took it for granted that it was your mind, your wisdom, that was bridging the gap between our worlds! You thought you could trick me into fighting your nation's battles—I, who first planted the idea in your fumbling brain so that you would have a reason to find the lost pattern of the ages.

"Now I shall come; for have you not invited me? My hordes shall pour through the gateway you have opened. Your whole world, not just your ene-

mies, shall tremble at my shadow! I, Timour Khan, should rule you all!"

No word passed the Japanese's lips. But with his eyes he hated the Mongol to hell and back.

Timour Khan laughed on.

"Take them away!" he cried gesturing to Brad and Mitsui. "Throw them in the blackest dungeon! And before they die I shall teach them to pray for death." Then, while he tugged at his mustache: "But first"—and he stared at Eve with hungry, lusting eyes—"I have other work to do."

CHAPTER VI

Enter Ranjit Saud

"SOME summer resort!" grunted Brad, peering around the murky dungeon in which he and Doctor Mitsui now found themselves. "We won't be troubled with vermin, though. No self-respecting bedbug would be found dead in a hole like this."

"The jest is ill-timed," the Jap reproached, eyeing his companion with distaste. "Remember that death—a most unpleasant death—awaits us."

Brad sobered.

"Right. And soon, too. Your chum, Timour Khan, isn't going to stall about it. Not he! He even murdered his own brother!" He paced the cold, damp floor of their narrow cell for a few moments. "And Eve! That devil will be after her damned soon, if he isn't already."

"Indeed," the other nodded grimly.

Young King met the jet eyes' gaze. His own jaw was hard.

"We've got to get out of here!" he exploded.

"Indeed," his companion repeated. "But how?"

Again Brad paced the cell. But this time there was purpose to his roving.

Desperate purpose.

The dungeon's walls and floor and ceiling were of stone, with an iron grillwork door on one side. There were no windows. A single crude wooden bench provided the only furnishings. Since the door opened into a larger and also windowless room, whose only light seeped through a stairwell on the far side, the place was as dark and miserable as any medieval vault.

Doctor Mitsui watched Brad's search for a weak spot.

"Your energy is wasted, my young friend," he clipped. "Timour Khan's guards would never entrust us to a cell from which we could escape. They know too well the penalty they would themselves pay should we break out."

Clump-clump-clump!

Like a confirming echo, the sound of heavy footsteps rolled down the stairwell. An instant later yellow rays of light began to penetrate the dungeon. Then a powerfully-built Mongol guard stalked into view, a lantern in his hand. He raised the light, peered in at the prisoners. Apparently satisfied with what he saw, he turned without a word and climbed back up the stairs.

"You see, my friend?" queried the Jap.

Brad nodded.

"Sure." Then: "But I don't get this 'friend' stuff. Since when did we turn pals? Seems like things were sort of different not too long ago."

"Of course," agreed Doctor Mitsui. "But now the situation has changed. We are in prison together. We are awaiting death and torture. So I propose that we forget the past. That we form a temporary alliance—"

BRAD was nodding slowly.

"It makes sense," he admitted. "No use of our being at each other's throats all the time." A pause. "O.K.,

we're partners. Got any ideas on how to get out of here?"

"Unfortunately, no." The Nipponese shook his head. "This place is too strong. Our only chance is when they remove us to the torture chambers."

"Maybe you call that a chance. But not Little Willy. I always figured I was a pretty husky specimen—until I saw some of these guards. With luck, I might handle one or two of 'em. But not more. And it's a cinch there'll be a mob of 'em when they drag us out to Execution Dock. Besides, they keep a hammerlock on you all the way."

There was a minute of silence, broken only by the scuffing of Brad's shoes on stone as he paced the floor. Then:

"Mitsui, we've got to get out!" he exploded. A note of panic, almost, tinged his voice. Even in the semi-darkness, the harsh, drawn lines of his face stood out. "We can't let that devil, Timour Khan, have Eve. There must be a way—"

"Ialaya!"

Out of the dark it came a single word. Tension was in it, and fear, and hysteria. A mere whisper it was. A woman's whisper.

"Mitsui!" Brad was whirling. "Mitsui! Did you hear it? What was it?"

The Japanese already was pressed tight against the bars. He mumbled strange syllables in an alien tongue.

Back came an answer. Then the speaker herself.

In years, perhaps, she was relatively a young woman. But labor and tragedy had made her old before her time. Already her face was coarse and wrinkled, her dark hair streaked with gray. She stood before them, close to the grillwork, a weary, toil-twisted figure.

Again she spoke still whispering. For five minutes Doctor Mitsui talked with her, his tone more excited every second.

"What is it, Doc? What's she say-

ing?" Brad broke in. "Who is she, anyhow? What's she doing here—"

The other gestured for silence.

"You remember the white man Timour Khan killed this morning?"

"Yes. Sure."

"This woman is his wife. They were slaves of the Mongols. When her husband was killed, this woman swore vengeance against the Khan. She will help us to escape if we will aid her against Timour."

"If we will—" Brad's eyes were flashing. "*Will* we! Give us a chance to get out of here and we'll cut his throat so fast—"

CONTEMPT showed in the Jap's jet orbs.

"Do not be so stupid. How can this woman aid us? She is a poor, helpless fool—"

"Can she get some kind of a weapon? A club? A knife?"

The Nipponese spat syllables. Then:

"She already has a knife. Here." He held out a long, stiletto-like dagger. "Little good it can do us! Even if we persuaded the guard to come close, we could not stab him through the bars unless he was blind. And this woman is too weak to attack anyone."

"Yes?" The American smiled thinly. "Don't be too sure of yourself, Mitsui. There's more than one way to skin a cat—or to get out of a Mongol jail. Now, listen—"

Carefully and in detail he outlined his plan. And the longer he talked, the broader grew the Jap's wolfish grin.

"It is good!" the Oriental exclaimed. "The guard will never know—"

"Let's just say it's worth a try," the other broke in. "Now let's be sure we've got it straight. . . ."

Less than a minute later, Brad screamed. He shouted. He bellowed. On and on, at the top of his lungs, while

echoes piled up in the vaulted dungeon. On, until the thud of approaching footsteps beat upon the stairs and the Mongol guard—lantern in hand—came running toward the cell.

Doctor Mitsui lay sprawled on his face on the floor, a study in unconsciousness. The top of his head nearly touched the bars. His arms were thrust through the grillwork so that his hands and forearms lay on the floor of the larger room.

The guard surveyed the scene with suspicious eyes, while Brad continued to shout and gesture toward the fallen Japanese. The American even dropped to one knee long enough to lift his cell-mate's head, point frantically to one side of it, and drop it again.

The Mongol came closer. Stared down at the Jap.

Again Brad went through the head-lifting routine.

The guard bent to see for himself.

In that instant Brad's hands shot through the grillwork. Clutched for the Mongol's shoulders.

But Mitsui had been right. No man could move fast enough to catch anyone beyond the bars unawares. The guard leaped back.

Or, rather, the guard *started* to leap back. But his feet never left the floor, for Mitsui—hands already through the grillwork—had caught him by the ankles in a grip of steel; was jerking his legs from under him.

The Mongol reeled. But he was big, powerful. He staggered against the bars. Started to catch himself. His teeth were bared in a snarl of rage. Instinctively he clutched for the scimitar that hung by his side, still lurching though he was.

AND then, at that precise instant, Brad's big hands rammed against the Mongol's chest. The American's

full weight was behind them. He smashed against the Asiatic like an animated battering ram. At the same moment Mitsui gave another tremendous jerk at the man's ankles.

The guard pitched backwards in a wild fall. His head struck hard against the stone floor with the *crack* of a melon breaking.

The prisoners never knew whether the fall killed the man. For as he hit the floor, the woman who had come to aid them sprang from the dark shadows that concealed her. The hand that held the knife rose and fell. Rose, dripping, and stabbed down again, and again, and again, while the woman sobbed out the hate that boiled within her. Then, at last, she stopped, and a moment later had stripped the keys to the cell from the Mongol's belt and was unlocking the door.

Silently, like three ghosts, the trio slipped up the stairway, then down a long, dank corridor. The woman took the lead.

"Her husband was imprisoned here until today," Doctor Mitsui explained under his breath as they hurried along. "That is how she got in—the guards were used to letting her come here to see her husband, so they paid her no heed."

"What did he do? Her husband, I mean."

"She says he dared to curse a Mongol who struck him."

Then they were coming out onto a narrow gallery overlooking a courtyard. The woman dropped flat, mumbling something to the Japanese.

"Down!" he commanded Brad, simultaneously setting the example. "She says that here is the most dangerous part of our journey, for soldiers are constantly crossing the yard below. Should they look up and see us, we are doomed!"

Flat on their bellies, the trio squirmed forward. Brad felt sweat trickle down the side of his face and off from his chin. Nor was it entirely exertion that brought it, for they were under the open sky here, where the late afternoon sun blazed down upon them. He glanced across the court. Suddenly realized that the opposite wall rose above them—and that, at this moment, one of the Mongols was staring down at them incredulously from a narrow window.

As if they were synchronized, both Brad and the Asiatic moved—the Mongol away from the window, the American in a headlong rush for the far end of the gallery.

"Come on! They've spotted us!" young King snapped, as he passed the still-crawling Mitsui and the woman.

Behind them, already, welled a rising roar of rage. There was a thunder of feet, a clashing of weapons.

Together, the fleeing trio lunged onward. But the woman already was sobbing.

"What's wrong with her?" Brad panted. "What's she crying about?" His nerves were on edge, his voice edged with quick, unreasoning anger.

Beside him, Mitsui cursed in Japanese.

"She says we are trapped," he gasped. "She says we can never reach the gates before it is too late."

The woman sobbed a half-dozen words. The Nipponese paled.

"She says—"

HE NEVER finished the phrase. At the end of the corridor ahead of them grim figures loomed, girded for battle. A dozen of them. Scimitars drawn, they charged on the oncoming three.

Brad slammed to a smoking stop. Then glimpsed a narrow side-passage

which opened a few feet ahead.

"This way!"

The trio rushed for the opening. Reached it only feet ahead of their pursuers.

It was a stairway. They took it three and four steps at a time, Brad in the lead. But the enemy was closing in. The short-legged Jap and fast-weakening woman were no match for the Mongol fighting men.

The American reached the head of the stairs. Spun about.

"Hurry!" he raged. "For 'God's sake, hurry!"

Even as he spoke, he was turning again, searching frantically for some weapon besides the pitiful knife the woman had brought.

His companions topped the stairs. Raced off down this new hall. The Mongols already were thundering up the narrow well. Yet still Brad hesitated.

A bench caught his eye. It stood against the rough railing that edged the stair-well. The sight of it struck a spark within his brain.

With one leap he was beside it, snatching up its clumsy, hundred-pound hardwood bulk.

A Mongol, half-way up the stairs, bared his teeth in a savage grimace of triumph. His scimitar swept down in a blood-thirsting cut that would have taken the American's head from his body had it connected.

But Brad side-stepped. Parried the blow with the bench. Then smashed the heavy thing down, club-like, on the other's head. He heard the man's skull crush like an egg-shell. Saw the other Mongols stagger backward under the impact of their fellow's crumpling body.

Again Brad smashed down with the bench. Then drew it back and hurled it on his adversaries like a javelin. They thundered curses; struggled to free

themselves of it. But before they could succeed, the American had torn loose the railing around the well and piled that, too, down upon them, before sprinting after Mitsui and the woman.

The fight itself had taken less time than the telling. His companions were just disappearing out a doorway that marked the end of the corridor. He raced in pursuit. Himself reached the doorway. It opened out onto a tiny balcony, from which a narrow stairs—much like the fire escapes he knew in his own world—ran to the street below. Even now, Mitsui and the woman were hesitating on the nearest corner, waiting for him to appear. He hurried to join them.

THE trio ended up, eventually, in a dismal, dirty hole deep in the vast, slave-populated slum which surrounded the great fortress-prison in which the two men had been held captive. A dozen times, on the way, Mongol fighters nearly ran them down. Only the guidance of the woman led them to safety.

Brad looked curiously around the room in which they found themselves.

"Her home," the Japanese explained.

The room's lone table was littered with scraps of the same translucent plastic of which so much of this world's goods was constructed. Remembering the walls of the room in which he and Eve had recovered consciousness, the American examined it.

"Funny stuff," he grunted. "The designs they work into it are wonderful."

"A stencil process," advised Doctor Mitsui after a moment's conversation with the woman. "The material is somehow very sensitive to light. Our friend, here, says that if any object is laid against the surface and light turned onto both, the plastic will carry a distinct impression forever. Those designs

were her husband's specialty. He worked in plastics."

"Interesting," agreed Brad. Absently, he tucked a fragment of the material into his pocket.

"But we have more important things to consider," broke in the other. His ugly face wrinkled in a frown. "We dare not stay here long. We must decide where to go next."

Brad nodded, and his own face grew hard.

"Right. It's nearly nightfall, now. And that means trouble for Eve—if it hasn't come already." At the thought, an awful, sinking feeling crept through him.

"And what do you suggest?"

"There's a thirty-thirty deer rifle lying around back at that place we were this morning," the American observed, eyes gleaming coldly. "I'd like to get my lunch-hooks on it. I've got an idea I could have a lot of fun with Timour Khan if I ever looked at him through gunights."

The Japanese nodded.

"The negative for the geomantic pattern, it too is there," he remarked. "We must have it, or we shall be unable ever to return to our own world."

Brad came to his feet, big and grim and competent.

"Then let's get on our way. How far is it?"

Again the Japanese went into consultation with their rescuer.

"She will lead us there," he said at last.

There was a Mongol guard at the place they sought. But he was alone and sleepy, for dusk already was settling over the city . . . he died with the knife in his ribs.

AND then, once again, they were inside, and Brad's hands were wrapping around the comforting coolness of

his rifle, while Doctor Mitsui hastily gathered together camera and other photographic equipment.

Standing in the doorway of the improvised darkroom, Brad watched him.

"We'll head straight for Timour Khan's palace, or wherever it is he lives," he decided. "With any luck at all, we ought to find Eve before they even know what's going on—"

Cr-r-r-e-e-k!

The pair stiffened at that faint sound as if it were the roar of a lion. Then, slowly, the American's forefinger curved to fit his rifle's trigger. Ever so quietly, he turned toward the source of the sound in the room behind him.

A figure loomed in the darkness there. But not the gorilla-like form of Timour Khan's fighting men.

This person was smaller, slighter. He was moving calmly forward, disregarding completely the rifle's imperative muzzle as Brad brought it to bear on him.

Brad backed away. Let the stranger advance until the light was shining on his face.

"Hold it, buddy!"

The stranger stopped. He was of medium height and medium build, and his dark-skinned face bore both beard and mustache. Black eyes met all gazes unwaveringly.

His age was hard to decide. He could have been thirty, or a well-preserved fifty.

It was his dress, however, that really held attention. His head was crowned with a turban of many colors, in the front of which was set a strange, jeweled star. Two smaller stars depended from it. A long robe hid his body from neck to ankles.

Brad stole a worried glance at Doctor Mitsui. It told him nothing. The Japanese was standing as before, no emotion touching his flat, ugly face.

"O. K.," said Brad, his gaze returning to the stranger. "Who are you, anyhow? What are you snooping around here for?"

A smile flickered across the stranger's lips.

"You are brusque," he said in a quietly musical and somehow familiar voice. "Perhaps you have reason to be."

"Quit the stalling." Brad was cold and wary. "Who are you?"

Again the stranger smiled.

"My name is Ranjit Saud," he said.

CHAPTER VII

. . . and Exit!

A MOMENT of stunned silence followed the stranger's announcement. And before Brad King's shock-numbed brain once again began to function, the man in the turban was continuing.

"You are Bradford King, the son of my old friend, Winthrop King?" he asked.

The American nodded.

"It is indeed a pleasure that we should at last meet," the other smiled. Then, turning to Doctor Mitsui: "You, too, I know, and an evil man you are!" His face was no longer warm and friendly. "Your researches have brought you great knowledge. Great power, also. Power that you misuse—"

The Jap's face was stony.

"Who are you, to hold me to account?" he challenged in guttural tones. "By what right do you judge me, Ranjit Saud? I am your equal, or more—"

"And I am a man, given some small power to see the effects of the things you and your nation would do to the human race," Ranjit Saud retorted icily. "Do you think I do not know the vile

scheme that brought you here? Can you imagine me so stupid?" He was blazing with contempt. "I know you, Kikujiro Mitsui! You would release the horror of an invasion from this realm of barbarism upon our world. You would create a gateway through which Timour Khan's wild hordes could pour, to rob and rape and kill. You, and your cursed Society of the Black Dragon—"

"Break it up!"

Brad King's harsh command fell between the two furious Orientals like a bombshell. As one, they turned toward him.

"Maybe all you two have got to do is stand here and chew the rag about the state of things to come," he slashed, "but I haven't. There's a girl over there in Timour Khan's palace. A girl I happen to think more of than the whole damned rest of the world put together. Right now, even, he may be after her." He shot grim glances from one to the other. Brushed nervously at the brown hair that tumbled over his forehead. "Well, I'm not going to wait any longer. I'm going after her." And then, to Ranjit Saud alone: "As far as the Doc, here, is concerned, you can quit worrying. He and Timour Khan have gone phfft. He's worrying less about promoting a new army for Japan right now than he is about saving his own neck."

Instinctively, the man in the turban turned on Mitsui.

"It is true? You have broken with Timour Khan?"

"It is true." The Nipponese's voice was laden with hate's venom, and the jet eyes gleamed like a cobra's scales. His broad hands worked spasmodically, as if tightening about an unseen enemy's throat. "The dog betrayed me. It was all a trick to get the pattern, the design."

"So the private war between you two is off for the time being," rapped Brad. He turned to Ranjit Saud again. "By the way, how'd you get here?"

THE other smiled, dismissed the question's importance with a gesture.

"It was nothing. Do you not recall that you telephoned the police the night you disappeared?"

"The police? What have they got to do with it?"

"From them I learned that you had spoken of cornering a Japanese in a tool shed, although they found no one in the vicinity when they went to investigate. I guessed what had happened. Therefore I searched out the tool shed, found the carpet. Already I knew Doctor Mitsui's destination, and the formula for reaching it if one only had possession of the carpet. So I followed you."

The young American's brow knitted in a new frown.

"But you couldn't have made it," he protested. "You were in Baghdad. You say you came all the way to America and to my home, then from there to this world. Yet here it is just barely nightfall—"

Both Orientals laughed.

"Your journey between the worlds took days of time as you calculate it," explained Ranjit Saud. "My powers of concentration, on the other hand, were focussed on my goal. I came in but a moment. Your trip here was like the efforts of a blind man shooting at a target, it was only by accident, and after a long time of trying, that you hit the bull's-eye."

"I had been here days on end before your arrival," broke in the Japanese.

"O.K., O.K. Forget it. It's Eve I'm thinking about now."

Silence, deep and oppressive, settled

over the room. Seconds passed. Five. Ten. Fifteen—

"She will be in Timour Khan's great palace," Mitsui observed nervously at last. "He will have her in the farthest wing, where he lives with his concubines."

"How do we get there?"

The Jap hesitated. His yellow face was more and more seamed with worry wrinkles. He licked his lips nervously, avoiding Brad's eyes.

"I do not think we could reach her. It is impossible. There are guards, many of them . . ."

In two quick strides the American was upon him, catching him by the shirt front.

"What's the angle? Don't you want to go?"

"It is certain death," mumbled the yellow man. "The woman is not worth it—"

Crack!

Brad's hand slapped against the Nipponese's face. His brown eyes were blazing.

"What's the matter?" he taunted. "Are you yellow all the way through, instead of just on the surface?"

THE Jap winced under the insult. His stained teeth bared in a snarl of hate.

"Have a care, white man! Kikujiro Mitsui has never taken as much—"

"Maybe not. But you haven't got a gun to back you this time!" Brad raged. And then, calming: "What would you do if you had *your* way?"

"We could still return to our own world," the other mumbled sullenly.

"By making another print of the design from that negative of yours? So that's it!" Brad laughed harshly. "Only we aren't going to do it." He spun about, stepped over to the primitive enlarger, snatched out the 35 mm.

negative. "No. We'll play it my way—"

"Stop!" screamed Mitsui. He mouthed staccato phrases in his native tongue. Sprang toward the American.

With deft skill, the white man clipped him in the stomach with the deer rifle's butt. Then, while the Japanese gasped frantically for breath, he carefully secreted the negative in his watch pocket.

"This time we'll play it my way," he snapped. And, swinging aggressively around to face Ranjit Saud: "O.K. by you?"

"You are your father's son," the Oriental answered noncommittally.

"Come on!"

Doctor Mitsui hung back.

"Go if you will," he muttered angrily.

"I stay here."

"No dice." Brad dug him in the ribs with the rifle's muzzle. "I'm taking no chances on you. You'd be just crooked enough to try to turn us in to save your own skin."

Grumbling, the Japanese gathered up his hat, coat, and camera.

In silence the little trio made their way through the winding, alley-like streets toward the towering mass that marked Timour Khan's palace. Brad brought up the rear, every muscle tense.

"Timour Khan's the least of my worries," he told himself grimly. "I damned well know that Mitsui'll stick a knife in my back the first chance he gets. And as for Ranjit Saud . . . well, I'm taking no chances."

Few lights showed in the building ahead.

"It is the wing on the right where the girl will be," sulked the Japanese. "It is the best guarded of all. There is no chance—"

"Which floor?"

"The one next below the top."

"What about the top one itself?"

"I do not know."

Thoughtfully, Brad surveyed the building.

"There's no light at all showing from the top floor," he said at last. "My bet is that there's no one there. So we'll head for the roof. From there, we can come at Timour Khan from above. Maybe Timour and his pals will be so surprised we'll get away with something."

FOR the first time since they had left their refuge, Ranjit Saud spoke.

"A wise plan," he observed quietly, and then lapsed into silence again.

The entrance they chose was a tiny postern door. A guard lolled beside it.

"We've got to get him over into the shadows," Brad grunted.

"It is not possible," mumbled Mitsui. "To attract him here you must put him on the alert. He would cut you down—"

"Where do you want him, Brad King?"

It was Ranjit Saud. His eyes were like pools of black gold beneath his turban's edge.

"Where? What— oh, to have him come around that corner there would do the job." Brad indicated a bastion-like projection from a nearby building. Suspicion and surprise met in his own narrowed eyes. "Don't see how—"

But Ranjit Saud was not listening. Instead, his eyes were focussed on the Mongol guard, and there was the tension that marks deep concentration in his face.

Slowly, the seconds ticked by. Then the minutes. One . . . two . . .

The guard shifted nervously.

Three . . .

He rose to his feet. Rubbed hard at the back of his neck in a gesture of perplexity.

Four . . .

He shambled away from his post, peering about uneasily. Moved toward the corner the American had indicated.

Brad faded into the shadows like a ghost, his rifle gripped for the short, savage downblow that would crush the Mongol's skull against the butt-plate.

The guard passed the corner. . . .

On silent feet they slipped along shadowy corridors. Past a hundred dim, empty rooms. Then up one flight of stairs after another.

A door loomed.

"This should be the top floor," Brad calculated aloud, his voice aglow with triumph. "There aren't any lights—we saw that from the street—so it's empty. From here, we'll make it to the roof. Then over to Timour Khan's private wing, and down—"

He heaved at the door.

What happened next was never clear. One moment the door was bursting open. The next, light seared their eyes. They caught one confused glimpse of a great, bare, brightly-illuminated room before a Mongol—scimitar upraised—sprang toward them roaring a challenge.

"Look out!"

BRAD was backing even as he shouted. He slashed down with the rifle butt simultaneously. Saw the Mongol stagger under the blow.

But another was charging, and another. They were too many, too close, all to succumb to that deadly butt. . . . For the barest fraction of a second the American weighed the chances. Knew that there was but one answer. And that answer, paradoxically, itself spelled their doom. But there was no other way. . . .

He was spinning, then, to face the nearest warrior, and his forefinger was on the deer rifle's trigger. He squeezed it; felt the weapon leap in his hands as death roared from its muzzle in a halo

of orange flame.

The oncoming Mongol stopped short, still balanced on his toes for that head-long rush. His face was a hideous study in shock and hate. One hand clutched in agony at the powder-burned hole that had replaced his navel. The other, still aloft, released his scimitar; it clattered to the floor in a clanging death-knell. Then the warrior's knees were buckling, and he was pitching forward, his sword arm still grotesquely aloft, as if even in death he was invoking vengeance against his slayer.

But Brad was not watching. He had no time. Already others were at his throat, and he was swiveling to meet them, his fingers instinctively ramming back the bolt action.

Three shots he fired, all told. And then, while the echoes still rang through the room, his adversaries were fleeing with screams of panic.

"Come on!" rapped the American. "We've got to make the roof!"

Together, the three sprinted toward the far end of the room, where a second door stood open.

Thwack!

It was an ugly sound. The sound of a thrown knife burying its point in the paneling. Brad jumped back.

"No dice," he choked, shuddering. "We can't make it that way; I've only got two eartridges left, and it's a cinch that won't run 'em out."

They turned now to examine their surroundings, and the reason they had been unable to see this brilliantly-lighted chamber from the street became plain: shutters covered every window.

"What the devil are they doing?"

"Ai!"

Brad jumped at Mitsui's exclamation. Followed the Oriental's stare.

THERE, at one side of the room, hung a panel like a drawing board.

A panel to which was tacked the photograph of the Flying Carpet's design. And on the floor beneath it, still littered with ink pots and drafting equipment, lay a canvas with a copy of the design already traced on its surface. It was at least a dozen feet square.

"That devil!" Brad ejaculated savagely. "He's taking no chances. He's testing that pattern already. Making a copy of it, so he can send through a sample detachment!"

Behind him, Ranjit Saud laughed softly.

"Of course," the bearded Oriental agreed, still smiling. "Timour Khan is no fool—"

But another sound caught Brad's ears. He spun.

It was the sound of footsteps he had heard. Mitsui's footsteps. The Jap was running. Heading straight for the precious geomantic patterns.

"Oh, no you don't!"

Even as he shouted, Brad was lunging in pursuit, rifle raised for a knock-out blow. In half a dozen strides he was upon the Nipponese.

"Hold it!"

Instead, the Jap whirled, bent low. His shoulder hit the American hard below the belt.

Waves of agony swept over Brad. The world was exploding about him. His stomach was turning inside out.

But somewhere in the bleak wastes that were his consciousness at this moment, one thin thread still burned bright.

"*Eve!*" it blazed, "*Eve! Eve! Eve!*"

A dozen weird images swirled through his brains: Eve, as he had known her—blue eyes bright, golden hair a soft halo about her sweet face, lithe figure revealed to perfection by the sweater suits and silken hose she so often wore; Eve, laughing; Eve, tempestuous; Eve, wistful.

... And then, others ... Eve, horror-distraught; Eve, screaming in terror; Eve, struggling vainly against the lustling caresses of the slaving beast that was Timour Khan. He could see her face in those awful visions ... could see her lovely eyes starting from her head in stark fear, her cheeks blanching ... and, at last, the sanity going out of her, replaced by the madness shame and pain and loathing bring ...

They held him, those visions. They poured wiry strength into fingers gone limp with agony. Made him cling to Mitsui, and bear him down, and hold him fast. Gave him sudden energy for one more blow ... the blow that knocked the Jap senseless.

Then, while the seconds ticked by, he lay still, waiting for his head to clear and the pain to leave him. At long last he staggered to his feet.

"Damn you, Ranjit Saud!" he muttered unsteadily. "You might at least have given me a hand."

And, as if in answer, the Oriental's voice came drifting back to him:

"*Nahema kobal samiasa . . . Nahema kobal samiasa akbar khan!*"

In letters of fire those terrible, familiar words slashed through the fog that shrouded Brad King's brain. He whirled, eyes frantically searching every nook and cranny of the room. Stared, at last, at the newly-completed copy of the Flying Carpet's geomantic pattern. The drafting tools, the ink pots, had been swept aside. The photographic enlargement from which it had been reproduced had disappeared.

And—*Ranjit Saud was gone!*

CHAPTER VIII

Mitsui Makes a Deal

PARALYZED, Brad stood there, his eyes fixed in dumb bewilderment on

the intricately-inked canvas.

"It can't be!" he choked. "It just can't. He wouldn't run out . . ." He shook his head. Tried to drive the stupefaction from his brain. Slowly, the bewilderment faded from his face. It left him older, years older. The doubt was gone from his brown eyes now, replaced by cynicism. His lips twisted in a bitter, sardonic grin. "He can't run out," he repeated, "but he has!"

The next instant reality jerked him loose from his galling thoughts.

"Brad King!" cried an alien voice. "Brad King!"

The young American jumped sideways, instantly wary. His right hand shot out, retrieved the fallen thirty-thirty. He backed toward the nearest corner, holding the weapon ready to let go a shot at either of the room's two doors.

"Brad King!" the voice repeated.

He recognized it then. The voice he heard was not actually repeating his name. The words themselves did not even make sense to him. But they served to catch his attention and hold it so that another intelligence could meet his in a universe of discourse.

Brad's eyes narrowed. He knew of only two men who could focus their thoughts, thus—and one of them, Doctor Kikujiro Mitsui, lay sprawled unconscious on the floor before him.

The voice he heard dinning in his brain was that of Timour Khan!

He hesitated for an instant. Finally decided that no worse trouble than had already befallen him could result from his answering.

"What do you want?" he shouted belligerently.

"Surrender!"

"Go to hell!"

"You have no chance. My warriors will overpower you by sheer force of numbers."

"Go to hell!"

"The woman—"

Eve! Brad jerked as if he had touched a red hot iron. How could he have forgotten her, even for a second?

"What have you done to her?" he roared.

Timour Khan laughed aloud.

"As yet, nothing. But unless you surrender—"

"What good's surrendering going to do me? Or her either, for that matter."

The Mongol's tone was suddenly silky.

"It can buy you both an easy death."

Brad's lip curled in a sneer.

"Says who?"

"I pledge my word."

"Your word!" Again Brad sneered. "Do you figure me for a complete dope? You even brag that you murdered your own brother! I wouldn't trust you for the truth about the weather."

A pause. Then:

"Perhaps you will feel differently when the woman's screams are ringing in your ears."

IT WAS Brad's turn to hesitate. His face was pale. He darted quick, desperate glances about the chamber.

"Your decision, Brad King? Will you surrender now, or must I order my men to flay the woman alive?"

Suddenly, harshly, Brad laughed.

"How'd you like me to build a little fire, Mister?"

"A fire?"

"Sure. A fire, using this pattern your boys just copied for fuel—"

The Mongol ruler exploded in a spasm of rage.

"Touch that pattern and you shall die by inches, both of you!" he screamed. "Hungry rats shall gnaw at your bellies! You shall roast over a slow fire—"

Abruptly, Timour Khan broke off.

Brad, in turn, moved hurriedly across the room to a post near the canvas copy of the pattern. Simultaneously, Doctor Mitsui sat up and began rubbing his jaw, his jet eyes set on the American in a murderous glare.

Brad brought the gun to bear on him.

"I've got two slugs left in this thing," he declared grimly. "Make a false move and I'll waste one on you."

"Brad!"

Eve's voice! Young King spun toward the sound. It came from the farthest doorway.

Even as he watched, nerves on edge, trigger finger tense, the girl stumbled forward into view. Her lithe body was taut as a violin's E-string, her lovely face racked with pain. Behind her, shielded by her body from Brad's fire, crouched a leering Mongol. With one hand, he gripped the girl's arm in a hammerlock. His other fingers were twisted into the tousled mass of her golden hair, pulling her head and shoulders back until it seemed as if her neck must be strained to the breaking point.

"Brad!" she cried again.

The Mongol shoved her forward. Forced her to walk toward the white man, a living shield. A second Mongol, and a third, rushed forward to cower behind the first.

"You have lost your chance for an easy death, you fool!" rasped the voice of Timour Khan. "You shall die in agony, both of you! Yes, and you, too, Mitsui!"

Brad's breath was coming faster. His knuckles stood out white against the rifle. He glimpsed Mitsui moving closer to him. The Jap's jet eyes were fixed on the oncoming Mongols, his ugly face twisted with futile hate.

"You shall die!" Timour Khan chanted.

The American's mouth felt dry and cottony, but icy sweat was trickling

down his back. A lump of lead was growing in his stomach. And still, step by step, the Mongols advanced behind the cover of a tortured, helpless, Eve.

"The pattern—" he choked frantically.

"You would make a fire of it?" sneered Timour Khan. "You think you can damage it before a scimitar slices your head from your shoulders?"

BRAD shifted jerkily. His foot brushed against something. Momentarily his eyes fell.

An ink pot lay on its side, contents trickling across the floor in a murky, meandering stream.

Dawn was breaking in Brad's brain. The cold, gray dawn of a winter day. His jaw was suddenly clenched, his eyes again hard instead of panicky. He brought up the wavering rifle.

"One step more and I shoot!" he clipped.

His words were gibberish to the Mongols, but his meaning was all too plain. As one they halted.

Brad's hands dropped. In a flash he snatched the negative of the Flying Carpet's pattern from his watch pocket. Wadded it into his rifle's muzzle.

"Go on, you spineless dogs!" raged Timour Khan. "He is one; you are three. He cannot—" He broke off with a frantic scream. "Ai! Rush him! Stop him!"

But too late! Brad's feet were moving. Kicking the open ink pots onto the most intricate parts of the canvas-inscribed pattern's delicate traceries. Smudging the lines, blotting the design beyond repair.

"Stop him!" shrieked Timour Khan. The three Mongols started forward, scimitars flashing.

Brad whipped the rifle to his shoulder. But he did not aim it at the oncoming warriors.

"You lose, Timour Khan, you devil!" he shouted. "Your pattern's gone, and your invasion with it! And now Eve's dying—"

There was fierce triumph in his voice. He was lining the sights on the girl's left breast as he shouted, and his finger was squeezing the trigger—

Bang!

The vaulted room exploded in a mad bedlam of sound. There was the rifle's report, echoing and re-echoing. There was Eve, her voice rising in an awful, piercing scream. The Mongols, bellowing savagely as they charged. The clang of scimitars crashing against Brad's rifle barrel.

And then, above the reverberations, a wild voice was shrieking:

"Alive! Take him alive, you dogs! I want him alive!"

The Mongols closed in.

Sobbing with rage, Brad fought them off, lashing out with the rifle until yellow hands clutched it, twisted it from his grasp. On he fought, fists and feet, knees and elbows. But the yellow hands were clawing at him, dragging him down. The first three, he perhaps could have handled. Only now there were more. They sprinted forward from both doorways, wolfish giants who plunged into the fray with fierce grins lighting up their flat faces. They were like a wave sweeping forward—relentless, irresistible.

Brad went down.

"Alive! Take him alive!" screamed Timour Khan.

HE WAS there, in the room, towering above the fallen American, short seconds later. His great, blubbery form was shaking with uncontrollable rage, his fat face livid. He wore the same loose trousers, the same purple robe; but now Doctor Mitsui's automatic had joined the jeweled dagger

thrust in his belt. His men opened a path for him.

Painfully, Brad stirred, trying vainly to free himself from the grip of the powerful hands that held him.

"You live!" the Mongol ruler exclaimed, and hell's own fires lighted in his piggish black eyes:

One of the guards interrupted. Instantly, the khan whirled.

"The girl!" he exclaimed. "She, too? She lives?"

And a familiar, guttural voice cut in: "She lives, Timour Khan. She lives because I acted when your own stupid slaves were too frightened and thick-witted to move."

It was Doctor Kikujiro Mitsui.

Brad's eyes fastened on him like filings to a magnet.

"You!" the American muttered thickly. "So it was you that did it, you—"

"Correct," the Jap interrupted. His tone was mocking. "I could not allow you so ungallantly to murder the young lady. She is far too lovely for such a fate." He turned to Timour Khan. "Did you see me? I knocked up his arm as he pulled the trigger. But for me, you would have lost her. Now, because I saved her, you can teach both of them together the meaning of pain—"

"Damn you!" roared Brad King. "I'll tear your heart out, you yellow-bellied bastard! I'll break your back with my bare hands—" He hurled himself forward, heedless of the hands that held him. Caught a glimpse of a pinioned Eve across the room as his captors threw him brutally back. Raged while Timour Khan lumbered forward and, sneering, spat full in his face.

"They are yours, Timour Khan!" said Mitsui ingratiatingly. "Yours, to torture or to kill—"

"Fool!" said Timour Khan. His

first mad frenzy of hate seemed to have subsided. The wild, hysterical rage was gone. Once again his fat face was placid, his black eyes sleepy. He tugged idly at one long, rope-like mustachio.

"Fool!" he repeated softly. "Did you think you would buy your own life so cheaply? No! Like my brother, you are too dangerous. You shall die with the rest of them, as they die, in all the agony that my torturers can command."

But the Jap did not flinch. His seamed, ugly face remained unperturbed.

"And your plans of conquest, then?" he probed silkily. "What of them? Do you give them up? Do you resign yourself to this dull world of yours, when across the barrier lie untold universes, yours for the looting?"

"I have no choice," scowled the other. "The pattern is destroyed—"

"Is it?"

TWO words. Both of them short.

But they had the effect of a depth bomb hitting a submarine. They smashed the Mongol ruler's somnolence to atoms. Brought him forward in a rogue-elephant rush. His fat fingers sought hungrily for Mitsui's windpipe.

"What do you mean? It is stained beyond repair—I saw it, with my own eyes! Yet you question . . . What is your reason? Tell me, you dog! Tell me—" He shook the Nipponese as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Ai!" Mitsui choked. "Peace . . . Stop! You are killing me . . . peace, O khan of khans . . ."

The Jap's face was slowly growing purple. He tore feebly at the Mongol's fingers. Struggled for the air that could not pass his pinched windpipe.

For a long second it was touch and go. Then, slowly, a look of cunning replaced the ferocity in the khan's eyes.

He half-relaxed the strangling fingers.

"What do you mean? Quick! Or I finish the job!"

"The pattern . . . not gone . . . I have it still." Doctor Mitsui continued to gasp for breath. "Spare me and it is yours."

"Liar!" Timour Khan hurled him to the floor. "The pattern is wiped out." He aimed a vicious kick at his prostrate victim's ribs. "You want to save your neck. That is all."

"No! Look!" With trembling hands the Jap held up his camera. "See? I have taken another picture of the pattern. When I saw this dog, Brad King, thrust the other negative into his rifle barrel, so that it might be destroyed when he fired, the idea came to me. Before he spilled the ink upon the pattern, I photographed it. The design is saved. It is here, in my camera—"

"Arrgh!" Timour Khan snatched the instrument from the Jap's hands. Stared at it doubtfully with slitted eyes.

"Don't believe it, Timour! He's kidding you!" rasped Brad. "It takes light to make a photograph. Lots of light. And in here—"

"In here there was ample," slashed Mitsui. "My camera's lens is the fastest. With it I could take pictures with only half the light—"

Timour Khan faced him, eyes glittering.

"This camera," he murmured softly, "I have it now. Why should I let you go? What is to prevent me from dealing with you as with these others—the white man, and the woman?"

Mitsui bared his teeth in a shaky grin.

"What would you gain?" he asked. "The picture in the camera is worthless to you. Try to take it out, and all you will have will be a strip of cellulose. Only when it is treated by me will the lines stand out as they do in the pattern."

But I—I can enlarge it for you. I can make it big enough and sharp enough for you to use, just as I did before. Give me my life, and I shall do it. Or kill me—and forget your plans of conquest!"

"Damn you, Mitsui!" choked Brad, struggling against the men who held him. "Are you crazy? Can't you see what you're doing? Do you think Timour Khan is ever going to let you go, no matter what he promises? And even if he did, what about our own world? Do you want this wolf gnawing at the bones of it? Aren't you even loyal to your own country? Do you want to see him there, too?"

TIMOUR KHAN'S sleepy eyes fixed on the Japanese. They were asking the same questions as had Brad.

"Am I a fool?" sneered Mitsui. "Photographic developing and enlarging is skilled work—and I am the only man in this whole world who can do it.

"I shall make the picture only if I may work alone, in a locked room. Then, when the print is finished, I can leave for my own world by means of it. But since it is impossible for the man who goes from world to world to take with him the pattern by which he travels, the design itself will remain here, where you"—he nodded to Timour Khan—"can use it as you see fit."

Then, swinging back to Brad:

"You talk of our world's fate in this invasion. Perhaps it will be as you say . . . and perhaps not. But I am willing to make a gamble. I am willing to gamble that it will be the white races which go down before this world's hordes. Nippon can care for itself!"

There was a long moment of tense silence. Mitsui grinned on—but Brad noticed that perspiration was staining the armpits of the Jap's shirt.

As for Timour Khan, his lids drooped

low, and he looked sleepier than ever. A bland smile suffused his fat face. But his fingers were caressing the hilt of the jeweled dagger that was thrust in his belt next to the Jap's automatic.

"Which shall it be?" Mitsui pressed softly. "Is it a chance for conquest, Timour Khan, and invasion of the parallel worlds? Or do you prefer the exquisite pleasure of watching me die in agony? Which is worth the more to you?"

The Mongol ruler's smile broadened. He looked for all the world like a huge, good-natured billiken—a great, grinning idol bulging with blubber. He looked, in fact, exactly the way he had looked the instant before his knife ripped out the bowels of the enslaved white man that first day the Americans had seen him. . . .

"I have made my choice," he announced. "I give you back your life."

CHAPTER IX

The Corpse Comes Home

SUN streamed in the windows of the great room from which Eve and Brad had first seen this strange new world. It sprayed over the floor in a golden cascade, and glistened from swirling flecks of air-borne dust, and made the beads of sweat on the naked chests of the Mongol guards shimmer.

There were only two of the people in the room it did not seem to touch.

"Will he do it, Brad?" Eve Palmer whispered in a voice that trembled. "Can he, Brad?"

Her companion sighed. The girl had asked those questions a dozen times at least. Yet he put a checkrein on his momentary irritation. He could not blame her. How was it the poet had said—"hope springs eternal. . .?"

"He did it once, kid," he answered,

"and I don't figure it was any fluke. So there's no reason worth beans why he shouldn't make as good a picture this time. He's a good hand with a camera, is Mitsui."

"We can't let him, Brad. We can't! It's not only us; it's the whole world. If Timour Khan can break through with all his endless thousands of warriors—"

The man tried grimly to fight off the icy lump that grew and grew within his belly. Tried, and failed.

"Be smart, Eve," he muttered. "Look at the setup"—he swept the room with a gesture—"and then tell me what chance we two have got." He shrugged miserably. "A snowball in hell would get farther."

It was a strange scene. Brad and Eve were standing at one end of the room, lackadaisically guarded by half a dozen weary Mongol warriors. Beyond them, Timour Khan paced slowly, the precious miniature camera still clutched in his pudgy fists. Doctor Mitsui was represented only by his hat and coat, again hanging from the same wall hook as before; their owner was in the adjoining makeshift darkroom, busily preparing the necessary developing solutions.

"There must be something, Brad. Maybe we could snatch away the camera and throw it out the window—"

"With six guards looking down our necks, and old T.K. hanging onto the camera like it was a lifeline and he was drowning?" Brad snorted. "Sorry, honey, but we couldn't even throw ourselves out that window, let alone the camera."

As he finished, he moved over toward the casements. Instantly one of the Mongols was close on his heels.

"See?" he grunted. Stared gloomily out across the half-barbaric grandeur that was Timour Khan's capitol. His

face was pale and, despite the sparkling sunlight, he was cold.

"It's this damned waiting!" he mumbled under his breath. "It's standing here, and knowing it's the payoff, and not being able to do a damned thing about it."

Abruptly, he pivoted.

THE guards were as before. Timour Khan, however, now stood to one side of the doorway to the room in which Doctor Mitsui was working. His face was calm, but his knuckles were white as he gripped the camera. The instrument's lens glinted in the sunlight, and Brad noted that the shutter was set for the largest lens aperture and one-twenty-fifth of a second exposure.

"Leave it to Mitsui," he muttered. "You don't catch him taking chances on under-exposure."

As if his mumblings were a signal, the Jap's head popped in the door.

"I am ready," he said. "Give me the camera."

And then, suddenly, Brad knew the answer. It came to him in a flash, like lightning striking from the massed thunder-clouds that were his troubles.

"I am ready," said the Jap—and the American was moving.

He stepped forward swiftly, yet with such a casual air that he seemed almost to be sauntering. Two steps he took, straight for Timour Khan. They carried him to within little more than a yard of the Mongol ruler.

The guards' do-easy air disappeared like a magician's handkerchief. They sprang forward, reaching for the white man's arms. Timour Khan, wary-eyed, drew the camera close against his chest, like a frightened mother pressing a first-born child to her bosom.

Brad grinned good-naturedly, shrugged as if amused at such foolishness—and struck.

One moment he was standing relaxed and smiling. The next, his right hand was darting out. Like a striking snake, it lashed across to the camera and Timour Khan. Slapped down on the shutter release—

Click!

"Ai!"

It was Mitsui. His scream rose like the wail of a soul in torment.

"What—?" Timour whirled, black eyes bright and deadly. He still clutched the camera in a grip of iron.

"The camera!" raved the Jap. His ugly face was twisted with rage and panic. He sputtered incoherently.

"The camera?" The Mongol's fat face was a mirror of bewilderment. "Here"—he held out the device—"I have it—"

"Tell him what he's got in it, too, Mitsui!" jibed Brad, his voice exultant. "Explain to him just what happens when you take two pictures on the same frame of film. Give him a lecture on double exposure."*

He turned to Timour Khan.

"Or, if Mitsui is scared to give you the straight dope, I will." Grim triumph shone in his face. "That 'click' you heard was your dream of empire going pfft! Your pattern's gone—gone for good, this time!"

WORDLESSLY, the Mongol stared at the American. Then at Doctor Mitsui.

"It . . . it is not true!" fumbled the Jap. "The dog lies. He has made

another picture; that is all."

"That's all?" Brad sneered. "That's all? You bet that's all. I made another picture—a picture in bright sunlight of whatever it was T.K., here, was pointing the camera at when I pressed the button. It looked to me like he had it aimed out the window at all the buildings sticking up out there. That's the picture you've got—one with lots of lines. And it's right smack on top of the design you want so bad! You couldn't unscramble 'em in a thousand years."

"The dog lies!" Mitsui repeated. But there was a quaver in his voice.

Timour Khan's hand shot out. He caught the luckless Jap by the shirt front. Jerked him close.

"Is it true?" he rasped. "Is the picture ruined?"

"Figure it for yourself," Brad broke in again. "I don't know much about cameras, but it's a cinch that Mitsui's doesn't move the frames of film up automatically. And I'm willing to bet that there was a little too much excitement going on at the time he made the shot for him to remember to turn it."

"Is it true?" The Mongol shook Mitsui as if he were a rag doll. "The design . . . is it destroyed?"

Dull fatalism crept over the Jap's face.

"It is true," he muttered. "The pattern is blotted out."

Slowly, Timour Khan's fingers relaxed. He turned, fat face immobile, and stared at Brad King in silence.

Eve Palmer was pressing past the guards to her sweetheart's side. She clung to him, sobbing.

"Oh, Brad! You've done it! You've saved the world—"

"—and written our death warrants," the man finished grimly. His arm went 'round her shoulders, drew her to him. But his eyes were on Timour Khan.

* Since a photographic film remains sensitive to light even after one exposure has been made, a second picture may (generally by accident) be superimposed on the first. A positive made from such a negative naturally is a weird hodgepodge combining both pictures and, ordinarily, rendering them meaningless. Double exposure is the result of forgetting to move on to the next frame of film after a picture is taken. To prevent this, some modern miniature cameras turn the film automatically.—Ed.

The Mongol chieftain nodded.

"Yes. You will die." He tugged meditatively at one long mustachio. "You will taste pain, the three of you. Pain such as you have never even dreamed of. You will scream for death—for days you will scream!"

His black eyes seemed to grow brighter and brighter as he talked. His breath came faster, and his voice rose, arremble with fanatical hatred.

"You shall die a thousand deaths, you crawling dogs, and still it will not be enough! You have cheated me! Twenty years I sought an empire in the other worlds. I murdered my brother for it. And now you have stolen it! You have destroyed the thing I lived for! Ai!" He shrieked maniacally. "To the torture chambers with them! They shall die—"

"No."

Just one word.

IT WAS spoken in a quiet voice. That was what made it seem so strange—the fact that it was even audible through the wild tumult of Timour Khan's rantings. Yet it stood out like a lightning bolt against night's storm-blackened sky.

There was silence, instant and impressive. As one man, the little group turned toward the sound of the voice.

"Ranjit Saud!" gasped Brad.

He stood there, in the doorway to the makeshift darkroom, and his lips were smiling. But his eyes, below the jewel-starred turban, were like black ice.

"No," he repeated.

Timour Khan's hand drifted toward his belt. Rested between his own jeweled dagger and the automatic his men had taken from Mitsui. The guards stood grouped about him, bared scimitars swinging.

"I do not know you," the Mongol

purred, eyes beady. "I cannot understand it. For you are so great, so powerful, that you dare challenge even me, Timour Khan, whose word is law from one end of this world to the other."

"I come from another world," clipped Ranjit Saud, "and I tell you that these people do not die."

"Perhaps you would like to join them in my torture chambers," mused the Mongol. "Or are you immortal, that you do not fear the things men do?"

Ranjit Saud smiled coldly.

"I am mortal," he retorted. "Do not forget, Timour Khan, that you, too, can die!"

The other's hand closed on the butt of Mitsui's automatic.

"There have been many who spoke as you do," he acknowledged. "I know of none who lived to kill me."

Gently, Brad King twisted free of Eve's arms. He shifted his feet. Breathed slowly, deeply. Tensed himself for sudden action.

But Ranjit Saud still smiled. No fear, no worry, showed in his level gaze.

"None lived to kill you, Timour Khan," he agreed. "But what of the dead? What of those whose dying words were curses heaped on your head? What of those who prayed to live again, that they might see you damned as they were?"

"The dead?" sneered the Mongol monarch. "The dead? Do I look like a child? Would you frighten me with ghost stories?" He scoffed. "Hah! I have drunk as deep as you of strange mysteries and the occult. So bring on your dead, and face me with them. I spit on them!"

"As you will," shrugged Ranjit Saud. Still smiling, he stood aside.

Out of the darkroom's blackness came the sound of footsteps . . . *clump* . . . *clump* . . . *clump* . . .

EVE PALMER gave a little scream of horror and drew back, one hand flung out before her face in an involuntary gesture of panic, as if warding off some hideous, unseen attacker; the other clinging to Brad's arm. Face taut, jaw hard, he instinctively moved a half-step forward, shielding her.

Clump . . . clump . . . clump . . .

"Brad! What is it?" the girl whispered. Her voice was trembling. "What's coming out of there—"

It was as if the white man had not heard her.

"My God!" he muttered. "It can't be . . . the dead *don't* come back . . ."

Without thinking, out of the corner of his eye he watched the others: Mitsui, stony-faced but tense. Timour Khan, blandly mocking. The guards, murmuring, openly nervous. Ranjit Saud, that strange, grim smile lighting his bearded face . . .

And then, out of the darkness, HE came.

He filled the door like a man in a child's playhouse. Though he stood hunched, his head touched the lintel and his shoulders brushed the jambs. Lean he was, but hard and wiry as the storm-toughened trunk of a mountain oak. He stared out at them, obsidian eyes gleaming in his bitter, hate-distorted Mongoloid face.

"Arragh!"

The sound came from deep in Timour Khan's throat, a guttural grunt of stark, crawling fear. Icy sweat suddenly beaded his corpulence. The illusion of sleepiness was gone from his eyes; they were all at once big and bulging with horrified incredulity. His fat form quivered as from a chill.

"You recognize our friend?" murmured Ranjit Saud. "His face is familiar to you despite long absence?"

"No!" exploded the Mongol ruler hoarsely. "No, it is not he! It cannot

be! The dead do not return. They cannot take corporeal form—" The sweat was rilling over his gross body in tiny streams.

"The dead?" Ranjit Saud mocked him. "No, the dead do not return. But you forget—there was a world in which our friend did not die. A parallel world. You—" he bared perfect teeth in a thin smile—"should remember that. For did you not spend twenty years searching for a way to bridge the gap and open a path to conquest for you?"

"No!" choked Timour Khan. "No!"

"Yes!" contradicted the other. "You wanted to break down the barriers between the parallel worlds, and I have done it for you. Here is your first visitor—straight from the world of slavery to which you, yourself, condemned him!"

"No!" whispered Timour Khan. It was a prayer, a supplication.

But the man in the doorway was moving, now. His eyes were riveted on those of the Mongol ruler, and his great hands were flexing like steel talons, and his teeth were bared in a death's-head grin.

Clump . . . clump . . . clump . . .

Tight in each other's arms, paralyzed with bewilderment, Brad and Eve watched him come. Ranjit Saud caught the question in their shock-glazed eyes.

"You do not recognize him?" He shrugged. "But then, you should not. He is that brother of whom Timour Khan has so often spoken—"

"That murdered brother, Akbar Khan!"

CHAPTER X

Dead End

IT was as if the Oriental's words were a signal.

"Ai!"

Even as the panic-stricken snarl burst from his lips, Timour Khan was wrenching out Mitsui's automatic. His fat face hysterical with fear, he jerked the trigger.

Bang . . . bang . . . bang . . . bang—

Again and again he fired. The slugs smashed into the coming Akbar's chest. Rocked him with their sledge-hammer blows. Tore great, gaping wounds in his leathery back as they came out.

But on the giant came, his heavy footsteps echoing, his splayed fingers reaching hungrily for the blubbery throat of Timour Khan.

Like men turned to stone, the others watched, their blood as chill as icy water. There was something uncanny about it all, something too imponderable for human minds to fathom.

Here was a battle of the worlds. Here was a murdered man returned. But not from the dead. No. This giant had come back from something even more weird than *The Beyond*.

Here, before them, he stood: a voyager across space and time, from a strange, problematical universe in which the gods of chance had dealt him not death, but a life of soul-searing slavery. A life with only bitter, boiling hatred as its motive; only this savage, incredible moment for an objective.

—bang . . . bang—

Click!

It was barely audible, that faint snap, against the thunderous backdrop of the automatic's fire. But after it came sudden silence, for it marked the moment when the pistol's slide action racked back . . . and did not leap forward again. The gun was empty.

For the barest instant there was stunned silence.

Still Akbar Khan came on.

Timour's voice rose in a scream.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Help me, you dogs! Stop him!"

He hurled his empty pistol square in Akbar's face. Whirled to flee, his face gray with fear.

But too late. The giant's arms shot out. The hungry talons dug deep into the Mongol monarch's dewlapped throat. Forearm muscles rippled and swelled and knotted with effort.

The paralysis that gripped the group was broken.

As one, three guards leaped for Akbar Khan, scimitars upraised.

Instinctively, Brad galvanized into action.

"Come on!" he roared to Ranjit Saud, and sprang to meet the Mongols.

Already the first was poised for a vicious blow at the back of Akbar Khan's unprotected neck.

THE American launched himself in a headlong dive for the attacker's knees. Like a human projectile, he struck them. Knocked the man's legs from under him. They hit the floor together with a crash.

The other two charging guards collided with them. Spilled onto the floor, weapons clanging.

Even as he struck, Brad was rolling away. His hand brushed a fallen scimitar. Wrapped around it as he came to his feet.

Now the other three guards were charging into the fray.

One of the fallen Mongols chose the moment to lurch dazedly to his feet. He stood, for an instant, swaying, still mired by his prone companions' bodies. Before he could free himself, Brad struck, his scimitar cleaving the guard's skull like a melon. A mighty shove sent the dead man reeling square into the path of the charging trio. They stumbled, tried to avoid him. The American glimpsed Doctor Mitsui leap-

ing on the back of the rearmost, a knife flashing in his hand.

But one of the Mongols on the floor now caught Brad's ankles. Jerked him down.

Twisting frantically, the white man whipped his scimitar around. Landed with his full weight upon it—and the blade against his adversary's throat. The Mongol strained. Tried to wrench free.

Then the cutting edge was biting deep and Brad, off balance, pitching to the floor. The other's life blood gushed forth over him in great crimson gouts.

Before he could move, the third man was at his throat, a knife glinting in his grasp. Brad caught the Mongol's wrist. Strained to hold back that deadly blade. But the yellow man was too strong. Slowly, relentlessly, he forced back the American's arm. His teeth gleamed in wolfish triumph. Harder he thrust . . . harder . . .

Then, suddenly, the man straightened with a spasmodic jerk. His muscles went limp, and the knife was slipping from nerveless fingers. He fell back, dead. Where he had been, the calm, bearded face of Ranjit Saud appeared, dripping dirk still in hand.

Shakily, Brad rolled free.

Four yellow warriors sprawled dead. A fifth, wounded, weakly parried Ranjit Saud's thrusts. The sixth rolled on the floor with Doctor Mitsui, locked in a life-and-death struggle with the Jap.

And in the center of the room, overshadowing all else, still tottered Timour Khan and his murdered brother, Akbar. The lean giant's fingers were buried in his brother's fat throat, as before. But Timour's hand now gripped the jeweled dagger from his belt. Face purple, he still stabbed feebly at Akbar's belly.

Even as Brad watched them, they toppled. Landed in a writhing heap.

Then Akbar's hands shifted. His

muscles knotted with strain, and his jaws went tense with effort. He jerked. Once . . . twice . . . three times . . .

Crack!

The sound echoed like a pistol shot. Timour Khan's head lolled sidewise on a broken neck.

SLOWLY, painfully, Akbar Khan staggered to his feet. Towered, panting, over all. Awful triumph shone in his face. That, and awful agony, for he gaped with a score of mortal wounds; wounds that would have meant instant death for any other man.

He stood there, for a moment, swaying. A spasm of pain gripped him; contorted his flat face. His whole body twitched with it. His fingers doubled into clenched fists.

Then, as a giant redwood falls, he fell. Straight forward, stiff-legged, with a crash that shook the floor. He was dead before he hit.

Stunned with awe, Brad stared on in silence at the sprawled form. Then a cry of pain brought him to his senses. He whirled.

Death hovered over Mitsui. The Mongol with whom he grappled now was atop him, knife in hand. The Jap had not enough strength to hold back the blow much longer. It was the same setup which had confronted Brad himself but a moment before.

But before the American could act, aid came from another source.

With one swift thrust, Ranjit Saud disposed of the man confronting him. Pivoting, he sprang toward the prostrate Nipponese.

The Mongol atop Mitsui saw him coming. He leaped aside. Lunged for the door. Before anyone could stop him, he was gone.

"We're done for!" choked Brad. "He'll bring back help—"

Ranjit Saud shrugged, smiled wryly.

"It does not matter, Brad King. We were dead before he fled. But now, at least, we may die easily. We need not endure the tortures of Timour Khan, and others of his kind."

"What do you mean?" Brad's voice was hoarse. "Why do we have to die? Why can't we go back to our own world?"

"How can we go back? The one patch is destroyed. The pattern is gone. We are trapped in this world, where only death awaits us."

The breath went out of Brad. His eyes sought Eve, across the room. She moved to his side wordlessly. Slipped her slim hand into his. Her lovely face was calm, her blue eyes unwavering.

"I'm sorry, Brad," she whispered. "I'd hoped it would all end a little differently."

Simple words, they were. But they stabbed to Brad King's heart like a poniard. His throat was suddenly tight with emotion. He squeezed her hand hard.

"Forget it, kid," he muttered huskily. "We're not dead yet."

"No. We are not yet dead."

IT was Doctor Mitsui. He limped toward them, nursing a dozen cuts and bruises. His ugly face was tense, his black eyes glittering.

"Have you suggestions, then?" probed Ranjit Saud. "Have you thought of some new trick to save our skins?"

Before the Jap could answer, there was a rush of feet and clanging of weapons outside.

Brad sprang to a window. Then to the door.

"They're coming!" he cried as he rammed home the bolt. "Hundreds of 'em! They'll be hammering at this door in another minute!"

Mitsui turned on Ranjit Saud again.

"The pattern!" he exclaimed, every muscle tense. "The enlargement you took with you when you left the palace of Timour Khan! Where is it?"

"Where would you suppose?" the other retorted with curt scorn. "I took it that I might return from the world of Akbar Khan. Its ashes are there now. And only its ashes—for I set it afire before I said the incantation."

The Jap's jet eyes were blazing.

"You fool!" he raged. "But for you, my plans would have succeeded; Nippon would have ruled the world. Now, because of you, I die like a dog here, murdered by savages not fit to lick my shoes—"

"But for your nation's greed, and your own mad lust for fame and honor, none of us would be here!" flared Ranjit Saud. "What cause have you to complain—you, who opened gates that should ever have stayed closed?"

"You dog!" grated Mitsui. "All of us will die—but your life shall be mine alone to take!"

He was lunging forward as he spoke, and there was a long knife in his hand. His eyes were burning with fanatical fire as he stabbed at Ranjit Saud. Once . . . twice . . . a dozen times.

"Die!" he screamed wildly. "Die, you dog! I claim your life! It is forfeit to me—"

Eve was shrieking hysterically, then, and Brad's scimitar was swinging. The Jap reeled back, blood gushing from one shoulder. Again the American struck, this time for the throat.

His aim was true. Mitsui staggered . . . choked . . . and died.

From beyond the door that Brad had locked came a wild shouting.

The man's eyes met Eve's.

"The Mongols!" he grated. "They're coming, yellow devils that they are."

The girl choked back a sob.

From the floor came a hacking

cough. It was Ranjit Saud, his bearded face pain-distraught.

"It is done," he mumbled, and tried to force a smile.

The door began to splinter.

Brad's jaw was hard, his eyes like ice.

"The hell it's done!" he rapped. "It's never done . . . not till your chips are cashed in."

AS HE spoke, he lifted the stricken Oriental from the floor. Carried him into the darkroom, Eve close behind.

The door at the far end of the room gave way. In poured the Mongols, howling for blood.

Brad hurled himself against the darkroom door. Jammed it tight shut. Baricaded it with the table on which the developing trays and enlarger stood.

The Mongols hurled themselves at it like ravening wolves.

"Brad!" Eve's voice was breaking. "Brad! Don't let them get me. Kill me first! Please kill me—"

"And me!" moaned Ranjit Saud. "Kill me, too, Brad King. Do not leave me for them to torture before I die."

Brad stared from one to the other of them, his face pale, lips thin.

"There must be a way out!" he muttered half-aloud. He could feel the muscles at the back of his neck aching with the strain of concentration as he said it.

The door began to give.

". . . some way . . ." he repeated. Thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets. Strove desperately to think.

Its shape was strange against his hand; that was what made him notice it. A queer, jagged shape.

Almost without thinking, he drew it out into the open. Stared down at it. Failed, at first, to recognize it.

And then, suddenly, he knew the answer. Knew the beginning, and the ending, and all that went between. All from this worthless fragment that lay between his fingers. Already his mind was racing back . . . back to that rat-hole dwelling in the city's slums where he and Doctor Mitsui had found refuge after their mad escape from Timour Khan's prison . . . back to the home of a white man who'd worked in this strange world's plastics until Timour Khan murdered him in cold blood . . .

He could even remember what they'd said.

"The designs they work into it are wonderful," he'd commented, examining this little scrap curiously.

And Mitsui had explained: "A stencil process. The material is somehow very sensitive to light . . . If any object is laid against the surface and light turned onto both, the plastic will carry a distinct impression forever."

It came back to Brad King now, all of it, and instantaneously.

"Brad!" choked Eve, beside him. "They're coming!" Her voice was a wail of despair.

Brad shot one terse glance to the door. The top was cracked; the crack was widening.

Without a word, he erupted into action.

". . . very sensitive to light . . ." Mitsui had explained.

HE jerked the great tray in which the Jap had washed his copy of the Flying Carpet's design from the table. Full four feet square, it was. Sent its contents splashing across the floor in a miniature tidal wave.

"Brad! Are you crazy? Kill us, quick—"

Heedless to the girl's frantic appeals, Brad held the tray close under the light. Scrutinized its smooth, translu-

cent surface. Saw the ever-so-faint tracteries of the Flying Carpet's pattern, imprinted in the plastic by light's action through Mitsui's enlargement.

"It's here!"

He shouted the words as if they were a battle cry. Shouted them at the top of his lungs, while his eyes flashed fire, and new strength poured into his weary muscles.

The door's top panel splintered. A Mongol face leered in.

Brad's scimitar leaped to meet the threat.

"You want us, you yellow devils?" he roared. "Then come and get us, damn you! Come and get us!"

Momentarily the Mongols fell back. The American had no illusions. It was but a second's respite.

He dropped the giant tray to the floor.

"Eve! Quick! Get on the tray!"

"What—"

"Don't talk! Do it!"

Even as he spoke, Brad was springing to where Ranjit Saud lay. The Oriental's breathing had slowed. It was almost imperceptible now. Lifting him, Brad stepped onto the tray himself.

Another Mongol's face appeared, framed in the splintered door panel. A yell of hoarse triumph burst from his throat, and as one his fellows smashed again against the door.

"Ranjit Saud! The formula! The incantation! Say it, Ranjit Saud! For God's sake, say it!"

The Oriental opened dull eyes. He was only half-conscious. Even the pain of movement no longer twisted his face.

"The formula!" Brad begged. Great beads of icy sweat dotted his forehead. "The spell! Say it, Ranjit Saud!"

The weary eyes closed.

Brad stood stunned. It was too late!

He had lost!

And then, incredibly, Ranjit Saud's lips were opening. Half-coherent fragments of words were coming out—

"Nahema kobal sam'sa . . ."

Like magic, blackness was descending upon them, enveloping them, overwhelming them. It permeated them, body and soul, and transformed them . . .

MOONLIGHT was glistening in Brad's eyes when he awakened. It streamed through the tool shed's open doorway in a silver flood.

Dazedly, the man sat up. Looked around. Discovered Eve beside him, still asleep, her golden hair turned to platinum by Luna's rays. He shook her gently.

"Brad . . ."

She clung to him, still only half-conscious, and he slipped his arm around her protectively.

Minutes of silence. Then:

"Brad . . . Are we really here? Did we escape?"

"Looks like we did."

"And . . . Ranjit Saud?"

"He's not here." He hesitated. "He was pretty far gone, Eve. I think the strain of speaking finished him." Another pause. "He was one of the best. A real man, straight through."

Silence. Then:

"I suppose we'd better go in, Brad."

"I suppose."

They got up. Then stopped short in astonishment.

"The rug!" gasped Brad. "The Flying Carpet! It's still here!" He bent to pick it up.

Only a few inches came away in his hand. He tried again, and the same thing happened. The fabric was crumbling to dust beneath his fingers.

"Don't you see?" exclaimed Eve. "It's old, thousands of years old. And

it's been left out here in the shed with the door wide open. The rain's blown in on it. The sun's beaten down—"

"Yes." Her companion nodded. "And I think it's just as well."

They started toward the house.

"Brad," said Eve hesitantly.

"Yes, honey?"

"Once . . . that night we went away . . . I said some things I didn't mean. I—I called you a coward, Brad. I said I hated you . . . but I don't—oh, Brad! I love you so! Don't ever leave me!"

All at once, then, she was sobbing in his arms, and he was soothing her as if she were a child.

"It's all right, Eve," he whispered. "Everything's all right. You love me, and I love you . . . I've been loving you for an awful long time, you know. I want to marry you."

"Brad, you mean it? You want to marry me, right now, in spite of all the things I've done, and all the names I've called you?"

"That's right. I want to marry you, come hell or high water." He hesitated. Shifted nervously, almost as if embarrassed. "Only not right now."

"Not right now? Why not?"

Again that embarrassed silence. Then:

"Remember, Eve? You told me once I ought to be in the army, fighting totalitarianism and dictatorship."

"But—"

He hurried on:

"Well, now I've had a chance to see what a dictatorship's like—and I guess anyone would admit Timour Khan was a real dictator, all right. I didn't like it, Eve, not one little bit. So now I'm going to sign up and do my part to finish off the dictatorships in *this* world. Right away, honey. Even before I marry you."

Eve's blue eyes were bright and proud as she drew Brad's head down to hers.

"I'll be waiting!" she said.

THE END

SALT WATER MADE FRESH

AFTER three or four days adrift with no more fresh water available what wouldn't a couple of ship-wrecked victims give to be able to turn the salty ocean water into fresh thirst-quenching water. Well, by treating salt water with synthetic resins, closely similar to plastics used for radio cabinets, cigarette cases, etc., it can be made fresh. Ships at sea, and mid-ocean bases, will undoubtedly benefit by these products.

When sodium chloride, ordinary salt, is dissolved in water, its atoms break up into ions. There are chlorine ions, which have an electrical negative charge, and sodium ions which carry positive charges. Most of the compounds dis-

solved in sea water, or the impurities in tap water are similarly ionized.

In the molecular framework of which the resin consists are sodium atoms. When water which is hard because of the ions of calcium, magnesium, and iron it contains, is passed over such a resin, the sodium atoms exchange places with the hardness-producing ions. After all the sodium atoms are used up from the plastic, it can be treated with a salt solution, which puts them back again.

It is also possible to prepare the synthetic resins so that they take out the sodium and other positive ions from the solution, putting hydrogen ions in.

WISCONSIN BACTERIUM TO THE RESCUE

AFEW years ago a new industry to convert molasses into butyl alcohol was started in Puerto Rico. This alcohol found a ready market as a commercial solvent and was especially needed in the paint industry. A very vital part of this process involved the use of a certain bacterium which was responsible for the conversion of the molasses. However, there existed in Puerto Rico a germ-killing virus which attacked this bacterium and this was making serious re-

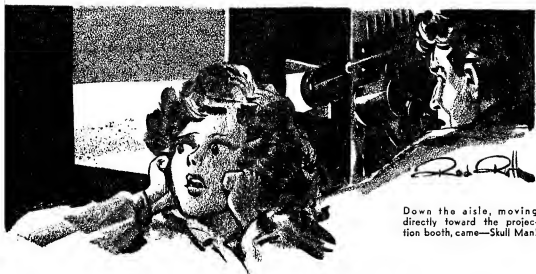
ductions in the output of the butyl alcohol.

After much experimentation, Professor Elizabeth McCoy, a bacteriologist at the University of Wisconsin, discovered a species of soil bacteria that is able to resist the attacks of the virus as well as having a high capacity to convert the molasses into butyl alcohol.

The new bacterium was given the name *Clostridium Madisonii* after the place of its discovery.

—T. Borr.





Down the aisle, moving directly toward the projection booth, came—Skull Man!

PHANTOM FROM THE FILM

by TARLETON FISKE

From a silver screen stalked a shadowed slayer. What prompted its mad mission?

NOTHING is quite as refreshing as a nice cold glass of water.

Tell you what you do—go pour yourself one, now. You're going to need it.

Good! Now drink about half of it.

There. Have you still got half a glass left? Are you sure that it's icy cold?

All right. Take that remaining half glass of ice-cold water and pour it down the back of your neck.

Then you'll feel the way I did on the night of Terry Sylvestro's preview. The cold shudder running down your spine will just about correspond with mine.

I'm not trying to sell you a bill of goods. Yes, I know—I'm Pat Peters, in publicity at Seven Arts Studios. A Hollywood press agent, always building up a phoney angle. But there was nothing phoney about Terry Sylvestro and his new horror movie. I only wish there was—then maybe I'd find it easier to sleep these nights. Sometimes, when that silvery shadow crawls across my chest and wriggles into my dreams—

But let me tell you what happened.

It all started when Terry Sylvestro announced the production of *The Skull Man*. That's big news along the Strip.

I don't suppose you recognize Terry Sylvestro's name. Funny, isn't it?—the public is crazy about movie stars but nobody knows anything about the real big shots, the producers and directors. Outside of Orson Welles and De Mille they're virtually unknown.

But the Coast knows Sylvestro. One of the big independent producers, a smart showman with a talent that spells boxoffice. Seven Arts was lucky to get a three-picture release deal with him. Everybody was on edge waiting for his first production announcement.

It came. I got the news the day it broke. Terry Sylvestro planned to produce *The Skull Man*.

A shiver drama from Sylvestro? I smelled a story. I hopped over to his office on the lot.

The story was waiting for me, all right.

"Get your hands off my throat!"

I heard the gasping wail as my fingers tightened on the knob of his office door. A woman's wail of terror.

"Get them off—you're choking me—Ooooooh!"

The door wrenched under the impact of my shoulder. I saw the owner of the voice—recognized her. Louise. *My Louise!*

Her fear-filled face hung before me, contorted in agonized dismay. And that was all I saw of her. For towering above her, broad shoulders moving convulsively as arms bent her body back, was a creature spawned in nightmare's darkest halls.

The silvery monstrosity was like nothing human. The torso of an anthropoid, covered with slick, hairless skin that glistened evilly—a huge, bald head resting squarely on the neckless shoulders, and a face—

into the visage of a fiend. Fleshless, bony jaws champed fretted lips which parted to reveal yellowed fangs. Silvery cheekbones reared about a gaping hole where a nose should be. And above that, bedded in deep-set sockets, burned hell's own fires. The eyes. The eyes of a demon, glaring with the idiot glee of a cavern gargoyle.

The creature hissed at me, and Louise screamed again. Then I lost my head. I started forward, arms swinging. The huge bulk of the monster loomed before me, but I didn't hesitate. I lashed out savagely, felt my arm pinned from behind.

A voice chuckled.

"Take it easy, Pat. It's all right." I wheeled.

Fat, bushy-haired little Terry Sylvestro stood grinning behind me.

"But he's got Louise—he's—"

"Isn't it wonderful?" It was Louise who spoke. The monster's hands still gripped her throat, but she smiled up at me.

"Wonderful? Why—"

"Of course, darling. I'm so excited! Sylvestro's testing me for the feminine lead in his new picture."

"All right," I said. "I give up. And I suppose this skull-headed gorilla here turns out to be Robert Taylor or somebody."

"Pat, I want you to meet a new star," Sylvestro broke in. "This is Franz Basilov. I've just signed him for the title spot in *Skull Man*."

Franz Basilov released Louise and grabbed my hand. He smiled through his heavy make-up, but the hideous leer of his pseudo-skull remained.

"Please to meet you, Mr. Petairs," he said. His voice was deep and the accent heavy. "This is great day for me, you know. Now you excuse please, I go and remove this." Again a smile. "I hope I do not frighten you."

THE face turned toward me as the thing noted my entrance. I stared

He loped out of the room as Louise giggled.

"Oh, darling, you were too funny—charging in here like a mad bull!"

"Go ahead and laugh," I retorted. "Lucky for you it was only a test. Can't blame me for falling for it, though. Certainly is a remarkable make-up job." I turned to pudgy little Sylvestro.

"Who's this guy Basilov?" I demanded. "Never heard of him before. Refugee import?"

"Not exactly." Sylvestro smiled. "He's a bit player. He's been in this country about six years."

"And you're going to make him carry the lead in your picture?" I exploded. "Are you crazy?"

"Not at all," the producer assured me. "Remember *Frankenstein*? What was Karloff before that? The film made the actor—the actor didn't make the film. That's the way *Skull Man* is going to work out. That's why I'm casting unknowns like Louise, here.

"Maybe you think I'm screwy." The word sounded queer falling from the lips of the erudite little production artist, for his eyes were glowing, intense, as he faced me.

"Yes, maybe you think I'm screwy. But you're wrong. I know a horror film is something out of my usual line. I know that the usual horror film is out of any *intelligent* producer's line. It's corny hokum.

"But I have something in mind that's different. A horror film that *really* horrifies! Not a stock plot with a series of stupid closeups of grotesque make-up, but a work of the calibre of *Citizen Kane*—with experimental lighting and camera angles to tell the story. To *burn* the story into the audience's brain. That's why I'm not using any name players. The camera will be the star of this picture."

I TAPPED a cigarette against the desk. Things were beginning to click now. "Sure, I get it. And what a spot for some real publicity releases! Sylvestro does an Orson Welles! Discovers celebrated new European horror star! A new thrill is arising from the lots of Seven Arts Studio to—"

A wave of Sylvestro's pudgy hand cut me short. He faced me, shaking his head.

"No, Pat. That's not the way. I don't want that kind of publicity. In fact, I don't want any publicity at all."

"What?"

"That's right. No publicity. Listen, Pat. I'm sticking my neck out here. For years I've wanted to do a horror film. For years I've filed away ideas, piled up research on the job. But it isn't the kind of thing Hollywood expects from me. I've never dared risk it. Now is the time. I'm doing this picture on a low budget, without name stars or writers. Production costs are low. And Monsen handles the cameras, best man in the business. I'm going to turn out a 'sleeper' picture. If it goes over, fine. If not, nobody will be hurt—if we don't publicize it in advance."

I puffed on my cigarette.

"But can't I even play up this Franz Basilov? Give him a man of mystery buildup with the fan magazines?"

Terry Sylvestro's eyes narrowed.

"No, Pat. He's just an unknown, understand? He's a foreigner, he's nervous and excitable. As a matter of fact, his past is—dubious. And I don't want anybody bothering him. He's ideal for this role and I'm going to handle him myself and get out of him what I want. I'll make him the monster of all time—but you must let him alone. Remember what I said. The camera is the star of this movie."

In weeks to come I had good reason

to remember what Terry Sylvestro said. Good and terrible reasons.

But we're coming to that.

I'll skip the weeks of production. I didn't see Louise at all. She was on the set day and night, and the set was closed to visitors. That meant studio officials too—when Terry Sylvestro gave an order, it went through.

Naturally the lot was full of rumors about Sylvestro's new picture. The designers hinted that he had gone crazy—was ordering the most outlandish sets and props. The other cameramen couldn't get a thing out of Monsen. He and Sylvestro were always closeted in the laboratories with the day's rushes.

But the big mystery was Franz Basilov. Who was he, and what was he? Why were he and Sylvestro inseparable—going and coming together to and from the studio?

There were whispers of his conduct on the set. How he worked only to music. How Sylvestro was driving him until he cracked up into almost daily hysterics.

They said he was a dope fiend—that he was crazy—that Sylvestro hypnotized him before he went before the cameras—that he was a genius—that he was a moron—that he was actually the monster he meant to portray.

"They" said. I didn't say anything. I just sat back and waited. I still had that feeling that a big story was about to break. Without seeing Louise, without talking to Sylvestro, without checking rumors—I waited.

THEN came the preview.

It wasn't announced. Usually a Terry Sylvestro preview is an event. They run the film in three or four suburban houses simultaneously to get audience reaction. There's a lot of ballyhoo and excitement. But in keeping with his policy on this picture, there

was no announcement, no fanfare.

Louise called me up that afternoon.

"Hello, darling—are you taking me to the preview tonight?"

"What preview—where?"

She told me. It was an obscure little house in Glendale.

"Sure. Shall I pick you up?"

She agreed. Her voice aroused my concern. It was a weary voice, and I might be haywire, but I could swear I detected a note of fright in it. Surely Louise didn't talk like a girl who might be on the verge of stardom. She didn't sound as if this preview meant a life-or-death verdict to her career. She sounded as though it just meant a life-or-death verdict to her.

But then, I was imagining things. Or was I?

Because when I drove her to the theater, I got a nasty shock.

Louise was pale, thin. Her eyes were circle-haunted. Her smile was forced, fixed. She trembled, but not from excitement.

I was smart enough to play dumb. I didn't appear to notice anything out of the way. My questions were innocent enough on the surface.

"Who's showing up?"

"Sylvestro, of course. And Monsen. And I suppose Dick Blynn."

Dick Blynn was a stock-contract pretty boy who played the male lead opposite Louise in the film.

"Anybody else?"

"Well, Mr. Kruger will be there."

Barney Kruger, the Big Boss of the studio. He would be.

"What about the new star? What about Franz Basilov?"

Was I really seeing things or did Louise turn pale?

"He—he isn't coming," she whispered. "He can't."

"Can't come? But this is his great moment—"

"He's sick," Louise murmured. "He collapsed on the set on the last day of shooting. Overwork."

"Sylvestro must have driven him pretty hard, eh?"

"Yes." There was a quaver in Louise's voice. "He had to go through tortures with that makeup."

"By the way, who handled the job?"

"Why, Sylvestro did it himself."

"Sylvestro?"

"Yes, he and Monsen. It took five hours every day to apply it and three to get it off. It's something new—special. For camera effects. It's horrible."

She made no effort to control her shudders now.

"Louise. What's the matter?"

"Darling, I'm frightened."

That was no news report. She huddled close to me, biting her lips as she continued.

"That awful face," she gasped. "I can't bear to think of the way he looked—that skull—"

I SENSED something phoney here. I remembered the day I broke in on their test for the parts. Basilov was wearing makeup then and Louise wasn't frightened. No, there was something else behind this, behind all the rumors on the lot, behind Louise's hysteria.

She was whimpering on.

"The way he used to look at me on the set—as if he were dead. And he spoke like that, too, as though he were talking in his sleep. Or from beyond the grave."

"Come on, Louise, snap out of it."

"I can't. You don't understand. You don't know what Sylvestro used to do to him. The way he talked to him in his dressing room. The way he directed him with his hands. And the torture he went through, with his makeup burning into his skin. Basilov told

me when Sylvestro was away. He told me what the part was doing to him. It was like a vampire—draining him of his life, his soul."

I stopped the car and took Louise by the shoulders.

"Here, now. Seems to me that you're the one who's collapsed, not Basilov. What's all this about Sylvestro torturing the guy? What kind of a picture is this, anyway?"

"You'll see," was all that Louise would tell me.

And I did.

The dingy marquee of the little theatre bore no hint of the preview performance. But when we walked down the aisle as the feature flickered to its end, I noted the little block of seats reserved for Dick Blynn, Sylvestro, Monsen, the Big Boss, and ourselves. One extra seat—that would be for the missing Basilov, of course.

We sat down. The others straggled in. Dick Blynn tapped my shoulder casually. Monsen, the cameraman, gave me a curt flicker of recognition from behind thick-lensed spectacles. Sylvestro entered with the Big Boss. He was dressed to the hilt—his usual custom on preview evenings. His smile was disarming.

I stared at Louise's pallid face in the gloom. Was she imagining things? None of the others looked a bit excited.

But as the feature ended, Louise squeezed my arm at the elbow until I winced with pain. She almost gasped as the preview announcement flared up, followed by the title.

"The Skull Man"

Then hell broke loose.

Never mind what the picture was about. It was all Terry Sylvestro hinted at, and more. Weird musical effects, distorted camera pans and angle shots, and a fantastic story about a man who became a zombie, long after death—a

walking dead man whose head was a bare and grinning skull.

Dialogue carried the action along. Louise and Blynn dominated the early scenes. But all the while the film was building up to the climax—the moment when Basilov, as the zombie, *Skull Man*, would walk.

THE moment came. The scene was a cellar crypt beneath an old house. Here *Skull Man* lay in ghastly slumber by day, waiting sunset time to rise and walk. The camera bore down on the door of the cellar as the light faded.

Then came the hellish part.

The film went *three-dimensional!*

The audience gasped. So did I.

So this was what Sylvestro had up his sleeve—this was why he had devised special makeup and closeted himself with Monsen the camera-man!

Three dimensional film. Two projectors running together is the old, imperfect process. But this was different. I looked at the back of the house. Only one machine running film. Yet the illusion was perfect. You could see the door stand out on the screen. It was vivid.

The audience was in a frenzy. They sat on the edge of their seats, these suburban movie-goers, and waited for the horror to appear on film.

It appeared.

As the door swung open—actually swung outward, I could swear—the figure stood revealed.

Skull Man!

I could see the gleaming silver body bulking, the face hidden by shadows. Arms swung forward, almost off the screen. And the monster advanced, straight for the camera. It was a medium shot and the image was life-size. The shadows fell away. I saw the face of *Skull Man*.

Louise gaped at my side, but I didn't

notice. All I could hear was the pulsing terror-throb of my own heart. For the face of *Skull Man* was the face of living death.

Death's teeth were fixed in a snarl of hate. Death's bony muzzle leered out from the screen. And his eyes—his eyes bulged and blazed from the hollow sockets in a stare that transfixed my spine.

Skull Man moved forward, towards the audience. The crowd screamed as one. It looked as though he were actually walking into the theatre. His arms clawed out. He reached. His feet moved.

And then—

Skull Man walked off the screen!

I saw it with my own eyes. Five hundred others saw it too. We didn't notice the muffled crash in the projection booth behind us. We didn't notice how the film flickered and died away. All we saw—all we could see—was that incredible silver figure, stepping from the screen to the stage. A life-sized silvery image—an image of walking death.

It moved to the edge of the stage. The crowd was on its feet. Louise was holding my arm, trying to tell me something. Her voice was lost in the single scream torn from the audience's throat. I didn't look at her. I looked at *Skull Man*.

Looked at him and *through* him. . .

His image was transparent. Solid—but transparent. But three-dimensional. Very.

Even as I watched, the monster was moving. His legs flashed. And then—

Skull Man leaped from the stage into the audience below!

THE silver body hurtled through darkness, arms outstretched. I saw it swoop and land. The skull-head descended, arms closed on a man's neck.

They were climbing over the seats in panic, now. The screams rose to a crescendo of fear. Somebody at the back of the house turned on the lights.

That did it. I could see everything. A little vacant space had been cleared in the block of seats where the silvery figure landed. Fleeing spectators huddled away from the man who now struggled in strangulation under those silver fingers.

I saw his body twist and turn. I saw his purple face.

But *Skull Man*—

There was nothing there! With the lights on, the figure from the screen had disappeared!

And yet the body hung in air a moment before sagging to the floor of the aisle. The skull-headed creature was nowhere to be seen!

Then the crowd swept back. Something was pushing through the packed mass. Something strong. Something—invisible.

For a moment, as the little wave of movement passed me, I caught a hideous glimpse of a silvery-transparent torso against the background of a woman's dark coat. Just a glimpse, nothing more. Then it was gone.

And now Terry Sylvestro was dragging me out of the theatre. I half-carried Louise through the mob. Straggling behind us came Monsen, Blynn, and the Big Boss. Monsen's goggle-eyes loomed close as he screamed in my ear.

"For God's sake, Pat—think of something! He's escaped—out of the theatre—loose now out there—loose on the world—"

We made our way through, somehow. But it wasn't until we locked ourselves in the manager's office with that worthy and a hysterical machine operator that we did any talking.

Then there was nothing to say. Nothing to do.

We couldn't help the manager. We couldn't help the shocked projectionist. Neither of them knew anything, or had any explanation. All we could do was get out before the police arrived on the scene.

Terry Sylvestro summed it all up in his car as we sped away.

"I thought I was making something new—but it turned out to be *Frankenstein* after all. I've created a monster. I pray it doesn't destroy me—and all of us."

"But how?" whispered the Big Boss, lips ashen as the tip of the cigar clenched between them.

"I don't know. I don't understand. The three-dimensional effect is ordinary enough. Something Monsen and I worked out together for a surprise. It's a revolution, but it isn't responsible for that—thing. I'd swear to it.

"Of course we used new makeup. I worked with Basilov for hours. I wanted him to 'live' the part. I'm afraid that somehow I've succeeded too well."

"But how do you explain it?" the Big Boss persisted.

"I can't. Nothing in physics, nothing in any science, nothing in any superstition can explain it. It's new. A man's image emerges from the screen as projected light-rays in bodily manifestation. Alive. And with a purpose, a will of its own. A will to destroy."

"Yes," Louise murmured. "And it's escaped in the city."

"THAT'S just it," Sylvestro sighed and brushed his hand through his hair with a despairing frown. "It's loose. Somewhere out there it's lurking. What it is and what it wants we don't know.

"But we must do something about

it." Sylvestro sighed again.

"What can we do?" It was Monsen who spoke. "If it's a film image it isn't visible in light. You can't see it. We found that out when the lights went up in the show. It's visible only against a background in darkness. Of course, even in darkness you can't see the image at an 180 degree angle."

"Yes." It was Dick Blynn's quavering voice. The young juvenile was badly frightened. "And if you do see it—then what? How can you kill an image?"

That silenced us all. For long minutes we sped on in silence.

I forced a grin.

"Cheer up. We'll think of something. Meanwhile let's get a little rest. Tomorrow is another day."

Well, I was wrong about getting some rest. I doubt if anybody slept much that night.

But I was right about tomorrow being another day. And what a day!

I spent the morning in town, clamping down on the press. The Big Boss pulled every string he knew, but I had to do plenty of fast talking to keep the story of last night's tragedy out of the papers.

The yarn would spread fast enough, anyway. But printed in the newspapers, it would cause city-wide panic. Nation-wide, perhaps. The gruesome revelation that an invisible monster was abroad ravening to kill—a monster bullets could not harm—would mean catastrophe.

The story was killed, somehow.

And when I got back to the studio, Dick Blynn was killed. Not somehow. But by—*Skull Man*.

They found him just inside the studio gates, lying behind his station wagon on the ground. He might have keeled over from a heart attack—but a heart attack doesn't leave the marks

of squeezing talons around the throat.

"He's here—in the studio." That's what Sylvestro said when I entered his office. "He's out to get us all."

I didn't listen to him. I was trying to smile at Louise. She sat there, next to Monsen, wide-eyed with horror.

"We're safe here," I assured her. "Look, there's a police guard just outside the door."

"But they can't see it in daylight," Sylvestro objected. I could have kicked him.

"Still, there's the door itself," I went on. "If the thing is solid now it can't pass a locked door."

"It could slip in sideways," Monsen reminded me. "It just looks solid. Actually it's almost two-dimensionally thin."

I had a kick waiting for the cameraman, too.

But I persevered.

"Look here, we're going to find a way out of this. The first thing we must do is to study this creature—your creation. What are its habits? What is it after?"

"Us." Louise said it.

"But why?"

"Because it hates us. It loves to kill and it hates us. It's a character in a movie, remember. A mad thing. And we, all of us, were opposed to it. That's why it killed Blynn. Because he was the hero. And I'm—the heroine."

I PUT my arms around her.

"All right. Let's grant that for the moment. But why should it kill that man in the theatre last night?"

"Panic. Or perhaps it was looking for us."

"Wait a minute. There's one sure way of finding out a few facts about *Skull Man*. Let's talk to the man who created him—really created the part and personality. Sylvestro—where is

Franz Basilov?"

For a moment Terry Sylvestro's eyes avoided mine. The producer bent his head as he answered.

"Basilov's ill. He collapsed, I told you. Don't drag him into this thing, Pat. The shock might be too great. It would kill him if he knew."

"It may kill him if he doesn't know," I retorted. "Get him down here to the studio right away. Every minute counts."

Sylvestro called. Basilov was on his way. We sat in silence. Each of us was watching the door—watching for what? An invisible presence? Here in daylight the whole thing seemed grotesque, absurd. But there was nothing absurd about the dead man in the theater and the strangled corpse of Blynn.

One more call was put through. The Big Boss did it. Shut down the studio and put a police guard around every lot. Only Basilov's car could come through now. If the monster was here at Seven Arts he would menace no one but ourselves.

A pleasant thought.

I nursed it until Basilov came in.

Then I got another shock. I'd seen Basilov only once, remember. At that time he was wearing the makeup for *Skull Man*.

It was a very different figure who now entered the office. Franz Basilov was tall and thin. His shoulders were stooped, his hair greying and sparse over his domed brow. His features were emaciated but kindly, and the only light in his haggard eyes was a glow of docility.

This man was no monster. This man was no phantom or fiend. He was—weak-willed.

"Weak-willed." The phrase struck a responsive chord in my brain. Basilov was weak-willed. Louise had said something about that—

But Basilov didn't leave me in perplexity.

He came into the room, hands twitching at his sides. His eyes lighted on Sylvestro and his lips twisted back in a convulsive tremor.

"So," he muttered. "It has happened, no? You knew it would. I warned you. You cannot tamper with the mind, with the psyche."

"You made me wear the makeup. You kept whispering to me your suggestions of evil. You commanded me to *be* the monster. You would not let me alone for an instant, no? Day and night you hounded me—"

"You're hysterical, Basilov!" shouted Sylvestro. "You're mad—"

"You are the one that is mad." Basilov stood before the desk, pale face drawn in a frown of accusation.

"You talk to me in my sleep. You make me watch the lights after I drink the solution and you suggest things to me that make me dream. You turn my soul into something wicked and dreadful that shines out onto the screen. You create this thing from my soul. You talk to me when I sleep—"

"HYPNOTISM!" I sat up. I had it now. Those yarns about Basilov being drugged, or crazy. Louise's story of being frightened by the man because his voice came from beyond the grave. The yarns about Sylvestro never letting Basilov out of his sight. Basilov was weak-willed. Sylvestro hypnotized him, made him a monster by influencing his subconscious while he was under the influence of some drug which released inhibitions. This, plus the strange makeup, plus the third-dimensional process combined in some way to create a new being—the image of *Skull Man* on the screen. And it came alive as a separate personality and body.

The realization was just a flash.

Basilov was still speaking when I finished my chain of reasoning. Sylvestro sat defiantly in his chair, an ugly smile about his lips.

"Crazy," he hissed. "Crazy as a loon."

Then I saw it. Saw it out of the corner of my eye.

Just a shadow. A silver shadow. Pencil thin against the dark shadow of the desk on the floor. Suddenly I saw it broaden. Of course—the angle of refraction was lessened. Now the grotesque elongated transparency that was the creature's body suddenly loomed upward.

Basilov saw it, too, but not in time.

He gave a choking cry. Hands went to his neck. And then, the monster struck.

I thought of de Maupassant's *Horla*. I thought of the struggle between *Jekyll* and *Hyde*. I thought of screaming, myself. I did.

Then I wrenched the gun from my pocket and pumped blindly at the air—the flailing air about Basilov's contorted body.

But he was slumping to the floor, throttled by that invisible monstrosity.

"Louise!" I yelled. I caught a glimpse of Sylvestro and Monsen racing out of the door. Louise was following, slowly.

"Louise—run for it!"

She heard me.

I turned to Basilov. Too late. He was lying there. And above him, as the sun went behind a cloud, I caught the faintest glimpse of the grisly shape of the screen monster, crouching at the kill.

A wild thought swept through my brain. Lucky for us the image emerging from the screen was only life-size—what if it had come off in a closeup later on?

Later on . . .

There was a clue here, somehow.

I wanted to think about it, but there wasn't time. I had to get out of here, follow Louise, protect her.

I made for the door. The leprous silver image was behind me. It moved fast. Fast as light.

I ran down the hall. Ahead the trio was racing on. Sylvestro and Monsen were leading. Louise struggled to keep pace. Sylvestro reached the door of the projection booth in the studio theatre, where the daily rushes were shown. The thing was solid metal. He had chosen it with an eye to protection.

He disappeared inside. Monsen followed. Then they shut the door. Louise arrived, found it slammed in her face. She rapped frantically, kicked against the metal. The door held.

"Let me in—it's coming!" she gasped.

The door stayed shut. The cowards were taking no chances with their own skins.

I turned.

SWOOPING in midair behind me, swooping silently, sinisterly, was the phantom from the screen—*Skull Man*. A wave of transparent death flowed down the corridor towards us.

I grabbed Louise by the waist.

"Down!" I muttered. And dumped her to the floor. We crouched there in the corner. The thing didn't stop. It flowed forward, straight for the metal door. Then it stopped, hung in mid-air. Baffled.

No! Suddenly the image seemed to alter its shape grotesquely. The head and shoulders were huge, but the torso and legs dwindled. Then I saw. It was bending sideways—bending sideways and *sliding under the door!*

A moment's silence. Then a muffled scream from within the projection booth. A scream and a crash.

The door flew back. I caught a glimpse of Sylvestro writhing on the floor, enmeshed in a silver shroud of death. Then Monsen staggered out, eyes sick with loathing and despair.

He came to us, voice hoarse with panic.

"The thing's got Sylvestro. It'll look for us next. What'll we do?"

"Wait."

I held him down beside us. Louise and Monsen kept their eyes averted, but I watched carefully as the silver image rose from the huddled shape on the floor and then flowed out through the projection slit of the booth itself and into the theatre beyond.

"Then, 'Come on,' I shouted. And dragged Louise forward. Straight into the projection booth!

Monsen followed. He screamed his terror.

"What are we going in here for? We won't be safe. Sylvestro wasn't. What can we do? We can't hide from it. We can't shoot it or burn it or kill it in any way. It's loose on the world, forever—"

"Shut up." I grabbed the cameraman by the collar. "Shut up and listen. I've got an idea. Where's the film for the *Skull Man*?"

"Why, the can's right here. We only made one proof for the preview showing. Rest of the stuff is still over in the cutting-room with the masters."

"Never mind that. I want the film you showed at the preview."

"Here it is—but what are you going to do?"

"Rewind."

"Rewind? But then—"

So I told him. Told him in a few short, crisp sentences. Monsen rewound. I got the projector ready.

"Second reel, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Well, make sure. Our lives may de-

pend on it."

Monsen rewound. Louise helped. In this crisis her panic evaporated. She managed to force a smile. Good girl, Louise.

I DIDN'T rewind, and I didn't smile.

I stared out of the slit in the booth at the theatre beyond—stared out of the slit through which the silver monstrosity had so incredibly crawled.

I looked into the yawning darkness of the little studio theatre and saw the silvery horror stalk. It was perfectly visible now—a phosphorescent phantom, sometimes life-size and sometimes hideously thin as it turned at an angle from my eyes.

It was searching for us. Its talons were extended to kill. Its skull-head was bent forward as bony jaws opened and eyes stared intent on destruction.

It was searching. In a moment it would notice that the projection booth was occupied once more. In a moment it would see us and flow forward, flow forward to rend and destroy.

"No sound! Track's not set!" Monsen's whisper was frantic.

"Never mind. Let 'er go!" I yelled the command.

Light flashed on the theatre screen. The projector started. The film went on.

Then the monster saw us. I didn't wait.

"Faster!" I yelled.

Monsen stepped it up. He was sweating blood, but he knew his film.

Louise was fighting to keep down a scream.

The silver horror glided straight up for the booth. I didn't watch. I kept my eyes on the screen. The film shuttled by. Swiftly.

And then, it happened.

Suddenly the silver phantom halted. It was almost up to the booth now.

The skull-eyes were wild with maniac glee. The claws, those intangible claws, loomed at my very throat. It was poised for the kill, ready to spring.

It sprang. I braced myself.

Then, in midair, the gleaming body stopped. Stopped so swiftly as to hang suspended in a flying leap.

Bit by bit it moved back, away. As though it were on the end of a piece of string that was being rewound. As though it were a fish being hauled in on the end of a line.

Further and further back moved the silver body. And all at once it was flying towards the stage. There was an indescribable look of confusion and apprehension in the horrid countenance. The arms scrabbled impotently at empty air.

Then it was even with the stage, flush against the screen. And all in a moment, as the film flickered on, the figure abruptly descended *into* the screen itself.

Descended, and disappeared.

IT was just a matter of seconds before the reel was finished. I halted the projector, yanked out the can. We tore it open, lifted the film from its spool. Monsen offered matches without a word.

The film sailed out of the booth in a fiery arc, and landed in a burning heap on the stone floor of the bare theatre beyond.

I turned and faced Louise with an honest grin on my face.

"That does it," I told her.

"But how did you think of it—where did you get the idea?" she murmured. "Running the film *backwards*."

"Just a hunch," I admitted. "We don't know yet what created the monster. All we know is that he came from out of the film. Therefore there was a chance in a million that he could be drawn back into it—if we ran the reel in which he appeared in reverse."

"Well it worked." Monsen heaved a sigh.

"Wait a minute. The job isn't ended," I reminded him. "We'll burn all the rest of the reels. The masters, too. We must destroy this creature utterly, so that he can never escape again. Trap him on celluloid and then burn him. Fire alone can cleanse the earth of evil."

I stared sombrely at the flaming pile on the theatre floor. The smoke pouring up assumed a fanciful shape to my tired eyes. For a moment I almost thought I detected the twisting, ghost-like image of the silvery monster. Then it was gone—forever.

And *The Skull Man* went with it. You'll never hear the story or see the picture now. But maybe it's as well.

As for me, I'm done with horror films. So is Louise. She's working in a love story now—but not in the movies.

We spend our evenings at home, Louise and I. We never go to the movies any more.

Some folks laugh at us for that—but I guess you'll understand. Because somewhere, sometime, it *may* happen again.

LOST AGE OF PREHISTORIC ANIMALS FOUND

PALEONTOLOGISTS of the United States Geological Survey and the Smithsonian Institute have found in the Colorado mountains near Denver the remains of paleocene mammals, which formed the boundary between the Age of Dinosaurs and the Age of Mammals.

The discovery was made in a Colorado mesa topped with a layer of basalt. About two hun-

dred feet down from this protecting cap of hard rock is a layer containing fossils of primitive flesh-eating creatures that roamed the earth about fifty million years ago. Below this is a layer of about fifty feet of barren rock, containing no fossils, and immediately below that is the stratum containing the dinosaur bones.

—Carter T. Wainwright

Meet the Authors

HARRY JENKINS, JR.

Author of

"A PAWN FOR A KING"

BORN: Yes. Place: Columbia, South Carolina. Date: February 9, 1924.

Little did my parents think when they first saw me that there lay a science fiction author. Little did they think. They were shocked beyond thinking. As for me, I said nothing.

Today, however, many people wish I were speechless.

But they don't count.

Nature, in her own marvelous way, provided me, quite thoughtfully, with teeth at the average age for "budding bicuspid," and I soon discovered the pleasant pastime of speech. These gurglings, of course, would have caused any semantacist to laugh wildly and lurch off into the night, shouting: "I'm a fiend with fangs. Iggle-goo, gurgle!"

Eventually I found that these words could be scrawled onto bits of stuff-to-be-torn-up called paper. No bills, laundry slips, calendars, books or magazines were safe from the fiendish ubiquitous pen of this ambitious young author.

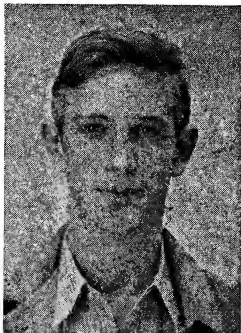
At this stage in my development, the biped Jenkins longed to sail briny seas in briny ships, but lacking the fuzz of manhood upon my oh-so-determined jaws, I was discouraged. Frustrated in my designs to sail the seven seas, I roamed o'er the Spanish Main with Blackbeard, Hawkins, Drake and other salty idols.

Through "realms of gold" I traveled to Treasure Island with Long John Silver; Kaintuck, with the five heroes of Altscheler's Young Trailer's Series; smelled the smoke and shivered with shell-shock at the battle of Bull Run; and marveled at the wonders of "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," Tom Swift, and the Burroughs adventures.

Then I moved into and out of, in succession, McMaster grammar school, Hand Junior High, and Dreher High School of Columbia. Perhaps the only outstanding occurrence of importance was the too-kind compliment of my Dreher classmates in bestowing the job of salutatorian upon me. Yes.

Trouble reared its ugly head in the form of an appendix operation, which allowed me to be present at the graduation—nothing more. The chance of a lifetime to stand before an expectant audience, clear my throat proudly, smile, and faint quietly away, had gone with my appendix. Ah me!

It was during my last year in high school that



Harry Jenkins, Jr.

I met Joseph Gilbert, who showed me the writing field. It presented a pretty picture—awaited me with open arms, that later snapped shut until I sold my first science fiction story.

I wrote my first story in early 1941. It, I frankly admit, not only reeked to high heaven, but didn't even make a good fire!

I hope you won't feel the same way about "A Pawn for a King."

Today, I am 18, and a sophomore in the School of Journalism at the University of South Carolina. The army, in its own octopalian manner, may soon decide to stretch its long arms out to seize me.

I won't be waiting.

Joseph Gilbert, W. Lamar Rush, Jr., and Lee B. Eastman, three members of the informal club, the Columbia Camp, and fellow writers, are now serving in the Merchant Marine. I shall join them there, as soon as I can.

Until then, however, I shall continue to write, try to improve, and will hope to see you again between AMAZING's covers. Until then, au 'voir.

(Editor's Note: Mr. Jenkins is one of a new crop of writers springing up since Pearl Harbor. We are beginning to wonder if war isn't a stimulus to creative instincts.)

A PAWN FOR

by
Harry Jenkins, Jr.

Milton reached uncertainly for
the pawn, while Blake grinned



A BIG metal hand slowly relaxed its grip on the playing piece and Jon Blake smiled across the table.

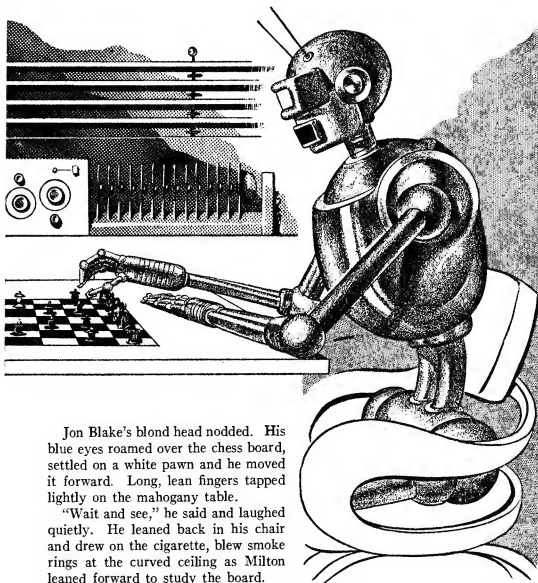
"Milty," Blake said, "you are a beaten man."

Milton, the tall robot, closed his sensitive eye shutters in imitation of an Earthly blink.

"But, Jon, have I made a mistake?"

A KING . . .

Milton the Robot tried hard but he just couldn't seem to master the game of chess. However he did learn its cardinal rule . . .



Jon Blake's blond head nodded. His blue eyes roamed over the chess board, settled on a white pawn and he moved it forward. Long, lean fingers tapped lightly on the mahogany table.

"Wait and see," he said and laughed quietly. He leaned back in his chair and drew on the cigarette, blew smoke rings at the curved ceiling as Milton leaned forward to study the board.

Blake could almost see Milty's iridium sponge brain contracting in deep thought. Funny, Blake thought, a man thinking so much of a robot—a creation of man himself. But, after all, a man gets that way after five long years on a God-forsaken asteroid, alone with a robot.

Blake crumpled his cigarette in a plastic ash tray and leaned forward. Milty still knew only the elementaries of chess-playing, but he was learning fast.

"Damn!" the grating voice said. Milton blinked his metal eyes again and looked up. "I'll be damned if I can see any reason why I shouldn't take that pawn. You can't take my pawn after I've moved . . . maybe you've slipped up."

Milton looked at Blake questioning-ly, but Blake maintained a solemn face.

Slowly the metal hand moved the black pawn into the space the white pawn occupied, grasped the white pawn carefully and moved it from the board.

"It is sometimes necessary to sacrifice a pawn for a king," said Blake and moved his queen across the board and onto the black king's space.

"Damn!" Milton said again. "When will I ever learn to play chess?"

Blake laughed. "You didn't do bad, Milty. Really you didn't."

The robot didn't answer. He lay his head into his hands, would have cried, could he have done so.

"But that's ten times straight," he wailed. "I should win at least once. Three weeks we've played . . . every night . . . and I haven't learned to play yet."

Blake's smile vanished from his face. He pushed the table silently aside, walked around the table and placed a hand on Milton's shoulder. "There, there, Milty. After all, I've been playing for years and years and I still

don't know how to play. Come on, sit up like a man."

Blake's smile reappeared as the robot straightened up; Milty liked to be called a "man." He attempted to twist his flexible metal face into an imitative smile, but failed.

He started to say something, but the shining face of the Visiscreen burst into activity. An incessant buzzing filled the room.

Blake walked over to the screen, snapped a switch and stepped back. Slowly, bit by bit, square by square, a rather poor reproduction of a face appeared on the screen. The lips moved, but the sounds took several seconds longer to reach the receiver.

"Earth calling Asteroid 38 . . . Earth calling Asteroid 38 . . . are you receiving us, Lieutenant Blake?"

Blake snapped the switch back and spoke into the little mouthpiece below the screen. "Am receiving you perfectly, sir. Come in."

The lips of the figure moved again. Blake had never ceased to be surprised to see the words formed and then hear them seconds later. "Orders from Prime Base to Lieutenant Jon F. Blake, Station Commander—Asteroid #38. Subject: Change of duty. Lieutenant Jon F. Blake is ordered to report immediately to Earth, Prime Base, for new assignment. Robot #321 will remain in charge of the station until Blake's replacement arrives."

The voice paused, and Blake's brain whirled madly. They couldn't take him from Asteroid 38; not without Milty.

The speaker continued: "Special conditions, based on reports from Prime Base Bureau, recommend departure for Earth between 21 and 22 o'clock, Solar Time. That is all."

Blake switched off with nerveless fingers. He didn't want to turn around—

Milty had heard the report and . . .

Blake wiped the corner of his eye with his sleeve and turned around slowly.

The room was empty!

BLAKE yelled "Milty" in a frantic voice and ran into the kitchen. The robot wasn't there. His eyes roamed over the small storeroom behind the kitchen—Milty wasn't there.

There was only one other possible place he could be in the limited space covered by the small station, and that . . . Blake dashed through the living-room, knocked over the chess-table in his haste and fumbled with the air-lock door. After what seemed minutes instead of seconds, he tofe the door open in time to see Milty about to open the outer air-lock door that led to the cold, desolate rocklands outside.

"Milty!" Blake screamed again, and the robot's hand relaxed.

"They say I must stay, Jon. Stay here without you."

Blake moved closer to the robot. If he worked too fast, Milty would open that last lock and step outside. Without his Gravsuit, he would shoot off into space, to be battered by the huge, spinning rocks that whirled around the tiny asteroid.

"Milty," Blake said, "come on back inside. I won't leave you here; I'm taking you with me."

The robot's hand flew up to the last lock again. "You aren't kidding, are you, Jon?"

"No, Milty, certainly not," said Blake with conviction.

The metal hands closed the bolts to the outer locks and turned around.

"I'll check our rockets. It's been a long time since the space traveler has been used," Milty said simply.

Blake's voice caught in his throat as he tried to speak.

THE curved dome of the reception room at Prime Base was decorated with a marvelous conception of the Universe. Milton's eyes roamed over the many-colored panorama in amazement.

The brunette receptionist with the horn-rimmed glasses glared across the rail at Blake and Milton. She scrutinized Milton closely; it was very, very unusual that a robot should enter Prime Base. Even one of the highly advanced class.

"Colonel Tilden will see you now," she said.

Blake doffed his cap to the receptionist, brushed an imaginary speck from his clean, white uniform and drew a deep breath. It was going to be mighty hard explaining Milty's presence, he thought, as he pushed open the door marked "Private."

The elderly man with close-cropped white hair didn't look up from the myriad of papers that cluttered his desk.

"Next case," he snapped.

"Lieutenant Jon F. Blake reporting from Asteroid 38," Blake said.

The elderly man looked up hurriedly. "Blake! Good God, man, it's been an awful long time, you know, since I saw you last. A long time."

"A long time, sir?" Blake said hesitantly.

"Yes, yes," the colonel said, "don't you remember? Graynow Preparatory School . . . in Perry's Port, Mars."

"Yes, sir," Blake said. His heart pounded madly. "You were my instructor in special mathematics."

"Indeed I was, my boy. And you were my best scholar, with the worst behavior."

They both laughed, but the colonel broke off abruptly.

"Behind you there—that robot," he said, gesturing.

Blake twisted his cap in his hands. "You see, sir, Milty, there, and I have

been together for five years, and I couldn't very well leave him on #38 alone. After all, sir, he even tried to commit suicide when he learned he was to be left there."

"But the Venusians may get there before we do, Blake. Don't you know there's a war on?"

Blake was startled. "A war . . . with Venus, sir?"

"Good God, man," the colonel snapped. "Don't you know that Venus attacked the Alman outpost on Mars two weeks ago? Don't you know that they've control of Luna through their damnable treachery? Why do you think we told you to leave 38 at a specified time?"

"I don't know anything, sir," Blake said. Their Screen had been on the blink for a week, and Blake had repaired it only the night before he was summoned to Earth.

"Well, if your robot would have remained on #38 and maintained the force field, we could have kept a valuable base. Now it's probably lost, forever."

The colonel came from behind his desk, his eyes had been fiery, now they had calmed. "But that is a minor point now. Blake, I am about to offer you a difficult assignment. We have learned through our spies that tomorrow the Venusians will have a convoy of about twenty ships on its way to Luna. Fortunately, one of our spies obtained time of departure and cruising speed. If we can keep that convoy from reaching its destination, it will give us time for our Martian and Mercurian fleets to rendezvous and join our Prime Base detachments. The convoy will, of course, be heavily guarded. We have here, at Prime Base, only a few of our battlecruisers, which *must* remain here for the defense of the base. So an attack in force would be impossible.

We do, however, have twelve light cruisers. Speed and the element of surprise will be on our side in an attack. I know of your remarkable achievements with space cruisers, I know of your rather remarkable feats during the Gladley maneuvers in 2015; and I know the reason you were sent to #38."

Blake frowned.

"The former commander of Prime Base knew your ability, too. He knew that at the rate of progress you were making, you would soon take his place."

"So he shipped me to No. 38," Blake said bitterly.

"But that's all over," the Colonel said. "Will you take command of the twelve light cruisers?"

Blake's chest rose and fell slowly. This was the biggest thing in his life. There would be responsibility plus, but if he made good . . .

"Yes, sir," he said very slowly and shook the colonel's extended hand.

He accepted the sealed orders, said good-bye to the colonel, saluted and walked out, followed by the ever-present Milton.

BLAKE glanced at his watch, paced up and down the small cabin of the little cruiser. "Check speed again," he said to the mate.

The officer turned to his instruments. "One-fourth A. U. per hour, sir."

Good, Blake thought. If they maintained that speed for another five minutes, that should bring them in sight of the Venusian convoy. He had poured all night over the figures, calculating, figuring, checking his Astronomical Unit speeds, rechecking and checking yet again. If there was just one figure wrong, they would over-shoot their mark, the convoy would proceed unmolested. And Earth—it wouldn't be a human-dominated world any longer.

"Jon," the metal voice grated, "may I ask you what those silver projectiles are in the third quarter down?"

Blake turned and stared wearily into the faceted eyes of the robot. "Those are spatial torpedoes. They are very seldom used now; not enough power in one or two to stop a big ship. Besides, their directional finders never were any good in space. But—they might come in useful; never can tell."

"But, Jon, wouldn't a concentration of them break a big ship's screen?"

Blake nodded. "About eight would work."

"Lieutenant Blake, come here, sir," the mate's excited voice said. "Look into the 'Scope."

Blake slid into the seat, peered into the round openings of the 'Scope and whistled softly. "Tilden certainly underestimated that convoy. If there aren't fifty ships there, I'm a Martian's uncle."

Blake rose, walked over to the speaking tube. "Connect me with all ships," he said and waited for the connections to be made. "All ships, attention. Screens up, rays ready, battle stations. This is going to be a tough fight, but—it's for old Mother Earth."

Milty sat down slowly beside the chess board in the corner of the room and looked at his friend as he checked the screens.

"If the instruments are working perfectly, sir, our screens are flawless."

Blake looked at the instruments, twisted a dial slightly and sat down before the 'Scope. The mate hurried over and connected a portable Wright-Lormier speaker.

"Speed?" Blake asked without taking his eyes from the 'Scope.

"One-third A. U., sir."

Blake's left hand reached out to a small wheel and turned it slightly. His right hand picked up the speaker.

"Speed?" he asked again.

"One-half A. U., sir."

Blake spoke into the speaker. "Down screens." He paused and a dead silence fell over the room. Milty stopped scraping a knight on the chess table and listened expectantly for Blake's next order.

Blake's face was tense, his voice cold. "Fire!" The mate stared into a duplicate 'Scope.

"We've got six of them, sir!" he said.

Blake's eyes came away from the 'Scope. "They've seen us now. They'll have their screens up before we can get in a second raying. Clear frontal visibility."

There was a slow grating and the dull metal of the nose of the ship parted to reveal the battle. Dull, sluggish, slow-moving freighters were literally surrounded by the green-colored light cruisers of the Empire of Venus. These cruisers now spurted forward, or braked with forward rockets.

Blake groaned when he saw the red ray flashes from the six big, sleek Venusian battlecruisers. He had hoped that they would rely solely on light cruisers for convoy duty, but now—

A TERRIFIC explosion shook the ship, it rolled through space. The steel beams seemed to shake and threaten to snap; great rumblings from the holds seemed to portend ominous disaster, but the little cruiser held together. Blake steadied himself, shook his head to clear his spinning senses and walked back over to the control board.

"Those Venusians are getting to be pretty darned good shots. That was a *close* near miss," Blake said, and checked damages with the ray-crews in the fourth and fifth quarters.

"Lieutenant Blake," an insistent voice came from the receiver. "Cruiser Rigel reporting. The light cruisers

Orion, Centauri, Vega, Capella, and Betelgeuse have been lost. The Venusian battlecruisers' rays are too strong for our screens, sir. Our screen is down, and—"

An explosion which needed no explanation echoed in the receiver.

Milton appeared silently by Blake's side. "Jon, do the Venusians use robot land fighters?"

"Of course they do, Milty. Leave me alone now, can't you see—"

"But, Jon, if they shipped them to Luna, they would go unassembled, and the ship carrying the iridium sponge brains would be the most heavily guarded, for without the brain . . ."

Blake didn't wait for Milton to finish. He strode over to the screen.

"Take control," he said to the mate as he scanned the scene below.

He saw a green freighter explode into fragments as a small Earth cruiser caromed into it. A Venusian cruiser glowed with an organish color—the ammunition hold was afire beneath the broken screen. He saw one of his own ships lower its screens, fire, and then be blasted into nothingness before it could get its screens back up.

There were eight cruisers and one battlecruiser concentrated about a single ship—a big, brown, ugly thing. The concentration could mean only one thing: that freighter was the ship carrying the robot brains. Blake reached for the speaker.

"Attention all cruisers . . . attention all cruisers," he said. "Report your condition and position."

He waited thirty seconds. One light cruiser reported; its screens

broken, instruments shot to hell, and leaking air badly . . . ten space points distant . . . out of the fight. The rest did not answer . . .

Blake turned around to speak to Milty. But the robot wasn't in the room. He spoke to the mate.

"In exactly one minute, turn around and run like hell for home."

Blake whirled without another word and walked into the second quarter, through it and into the third.

He walked over to the airlock door to open it.

It was already open!

Blake twisted around quickly, stared at the empty space where the fast, speedy little raft should have been. There were eight of the silver torpedoes missing—the raft could have easily carried that many. He didn't bother to close the airlock door as he passed it on the way back to the control room.

A deafening roar split the heavens and the little cruiser rolled around, tossed by the force of the explosion. Blake had anticipated the explosion, yet he had trouble maintaining his equilibrium.

"Lieutenant Blake, sir," the mate shouted. "The Venusian freighter carrying the robot spine brains has been destroyed!"

Unashamed tears rolled down Blake's cheeks as he walked over to the chess table in the corner of the room.

He stooped and picked up two chessmen, crushed by the strength of a metal hand.

One was a black king—the other was a white pawn.

THE END

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THE making of replica casts of the rarest fish in the world, the dinosaur-age, blue-eyed giant caught four years ago off the east coast of South Africa will have to be postponed until the war is over.

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Scientific



THE EARLY EGYPTIAN IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF EUROPEAN SPECIES OF MAN, CLASSIFIED BY KEITH AS MEDITERRANEAN OR LONG-HEADED TYPE.



Dr. ANDERS A. RETZIUS, IN AN 1859 REPORT TO SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE ON ANCIENT SKULLS OF AMERICA—BELIEVED THE LONG-HEADS WERE RELATED TO TRIBES OF THE EGYPTIAN ATLANTIDAE.



ARE THE OCHRE PAINTED PEBBLES, DESIGNED AND LEFT IN STRANGE LITTLE NESTS BY THE ANCIENT AZILIANS OF EUROPE, SYMBOLS OF A LOST ALPHABET?

Mysteries

MYSTERY OF EARTH'S LONG-HEADED RACES

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

The size and shape of early Man's head tell us much about him. Here are some of those facts.

ONE OF the most profound mysteries which science faces is the distribution of the first people whose skulls are distinctly modern—the ancient long-heads. How does it happen they were the first people to enter America? And if as most students of the Amerind (American Indian) insist at present, they came from Asia, as well as all other Amerind skull types, how can we explain the migration of a long-headed people from an essentially round-headed stock?

This is the riddle which reduces the theory that Asia was the sole origin of the Amerind, into an anthropological absurdity. But if they did not reach the early valleys of the Rio Grande, and the Channel Islands of California via Asia, how did they come? Or for that matter, how did they get to the most scattered islands of the Pacific (such as Easter), or of the Atlantic? In other words, if we do not admit that the invasion of all habitable lands first took place from the seas, why do we find traces of the ancient long-head among the present inhabitants of all the coasts, inland seas, and great rivers of the world?

Again for anthropological reasons, it is less likely that the Cro-Magnon invasion of Europe took place from Asia. America is not only the logical homeland for such a crossed type to have originated, since it is the home of the only present disharmonic of the Cro-Magnon type, but the distribution of the eagle or feather-culture, certainly bears out such an American center. All of these facts upon the background of the geology of twenty years ago would be almost inexplicable, but upon the background of the modern Taylor-Wegener theory of Continental Drift, in which we are dealing with a much narrower though more unstable Atlantic, these facts drop into place like the missing parts of a great picture-puzzle.

In recent years there have been coming to light an increasing number of skulls from the terraces of buried rivers, or from the peat bed which was once a submerged forest when the land surface of Europe ran much further out upon the old continental shelf than it does today and these

skulls are of the old proto-negroid (before-the-negro) type. All of them are the remains of slender, slight, long-headed people with modern skulls, and better than average capacity, or at least equal to the average. Keith, one of the greatest modern authorities, classifies them as of the Mediterranean type, of whom the early Egyptian is a good example. (At least one of these skeletons was buried under the ancient submerged forest by his fellows who little dreamed that ocean steamers would one day sail over their land.) Solas is of the opinion that none of the ancient races of Europe had white skin.

There is also a mounting mass of evidence that man of the modern type preceded Neanderthal Man along the coasts of Europe. This very early type, though with slightly thicker skulls than the modern or even the "river-bed" type of the submerged forest, is nevertheless, entirely modern in structure with normally high fore-heads and good average capacity. Once more, this man is definitely long-headed.

AS EARLY as 1859 Retzius in his report to the Smithsonian Institute on his researches among the ancient skulls of America made this statement, which though daring in his day, is being proved by time to have been a very keen observation. "With regard to the primitive dolichocephalae (long-heads) of America, I entertain a hypothesis still more bold, namely that they are related to the Guancho (Canary Islands), and the Atlantic population of Africa—the Moors, Tuaraks, Copts and others which Latham comprises under the name of the Egyptian Atlanti-dae."

Following the invasion of the Cro-Magnon, many centuries running into untold millenniums passed away, and then a new man came to Europe. He undoubtedly came from the direction of Asia for he had many round-headed members. Perhaps he was himself a mixture of Cro-Magnon mothers. Perhaps one tribe of the Cro-Magnons had wandered too far into Asia in pursuit of the buffalo and the ancient ox and had come into conflict with the round-heads,

who spared some of the Cro-Magnon women. Or perhaps the round-head men had travelled west, and after defeating a tribe of the tall, disharmonics, had spared the women. At any rate, we next have the Solutrean culture with round-headed males with short noses, and female skulls which strongly suggest the Cro-Magnon.

Above the culture of these mammoth-hunters, however, is again found the long-head. The invasion evidently came from southwestern Europe in the vicinity of Spain. These people left pictures of themselves on the caves of Spain and the pictures immediately tell us that in spite of their smaller stature and long skulls, they were of the Eagle totem. The men wore feathered head-dresses while the women apparently dressed in fringed leather garments. We see them hunting with bow and arrow, stalking game in typical Indian fashion, dancing ritualistic dances and fighting a tribal battle. We see the pictured face of what is without doubt a Neanderthal Man. Did a few of the ancient simian-looking Neanderthals escape extinction at the hands of the Cro-Magnons, to face it now?

Where did these people come from? Was the rising level of the seas forcing them out of some homeland upon the Spanish shelf or—beyond the Spanish shelf? Scientists have dated this invasion as having taken place sometime from the twelfth to the tenth millennia B.C.

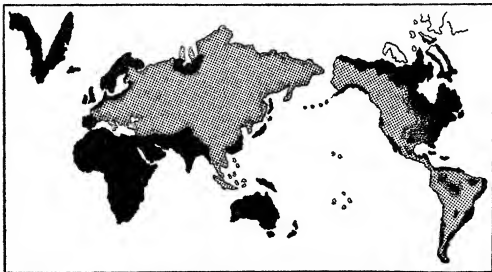
These Aurignacian-Azilian people are interesting for three reasons. First, it has been suggested that there are certain likenesses between them and the African Bushman, not as much in the physical type, as in the drawings which both peoples have left to tell their story. Secondly, they are interesting to archaeologists because of their "painted pebbles", and finally to ethnologists because of their totem, which the feather diadems

that they are wearing, proclaim to be the Great-Bird or The Eagle.

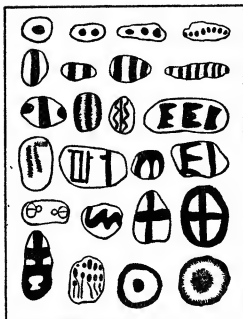
Now if we could read these facts correctly, they might prove to be interlocking strands of evidence, by the means of which we would be able to trace the origin of the invasion. The likeness to Bushman drawings is undeniable, while the similarity of the feather-diadems to those worn by the Sioux and the Aztec peoples is also undeniable.

THE new element which the Azilians introduced into the culture of Europe was the "painted pebble" or "ancestor stone", so-called because when similar stones were found in Australia, the natives told the explorers that each symbol stood for an absent person. They are flat, oval water-worn pebbles which have been painted with red symbols—with such a pigment that they have never faded in all the intervening millenniums. But the symbols? What did they mean? Were they the letters from a lost alphabet from which was evolved, the Norse, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon runes, as well as the Greek, Egyptian and finally the Latin alphabets? Why were they placed in strange little nests? And why were some of them, long ago, intentionally smashed?

Turning from the apparently unsolvable mystery of the Azilian "painted pebbles", to the Azilian burial, we find two more clues of origin. They placed the body in a crouched position, on its side, provided it with a liberal supply of red ochre and tiny, flint tools, and then built a great fire over the entire grave, thus fusing the flints. The tiny size of these tools mark them as ritualistic, for they are hut toys and entirely unfit for regular use. The use of them furthermore, tends to link the users as one people, and this is the interesting element, for



Map showing present skull-form distribution. Heavy: long-head. Light: disharmonic cross. Shaded: round-head. Note solidity of the round-head block, and greater mixing in pre-conquest Americas.—Map by author, after Huxley.



Some Azilian "painted pebbles."—After Osborne and Avebury.

they are found scattered in a long trail from Spain and North Africa to the Sudan, and from thence to the Caspian and to India.

Now we have three possibilities in this puzzle—that the Azilians invaded Europe from Africa, India or the Atlantic Ocean. In other words, we have three possible focal points for the culture. For anthropological reasons, Africa is the first to be ruled out. The Azilian is not negroid. He does not have large teeth set in his jaw at a protruding angle. (Neither does the ancient Bushman, however.) Does this not mean then, that Africa was invaded as well as Europe? The case now lies between the Indian ocean type, and the Atlantic Ocean, as the focal point.

Two pieces of evidence are in favor of the proto-negroid type which was centered in India.

1) The crouched burial is a typical burial of the ancient long-heads. 2) The physical type is certainly correct. One point is in favor of American or America-directed origin. That is the feather-culture. The element of fire-worship usually points to island residence, upon some volcanic fatherland where a Fire-god was a very real deity to be propitiated constantly on pain of sudden and terrible death.

Now let us see what we can make of this puzzle. We have a physical type which has an India center, carrying a culture which has an American center but bearing indications of island residence. However, we can not rule the physical type out of the Americas. It was the most ancient American type. It is the type of the Mimbres, who drew lovely fish-designs in their pueblo villages beside what had been rivers, apparently unafraid of attack in their unfortified homes; raising corn

on their terraced land and making thin, exquisite pottery for their everyday uses; ceramics whose beauty has today placed them among the world's finest art objects, for the possession of which the earth's great museums are clamoring. It was the physical type of the earliest peoples to be found on the Channel Islands off the coast of California when those semi-desert islands carried great forests of cedar and oak. It is the present physical type of a few scattered tribes of ancient peoples.

THE mystery of the Azilians will probably puzzle science for some time to come. However, we would like to make a daring suggestion. Is it not possible that some of the tall disharmonic warriors of the Eagle Totem who swept into Europe during the first interglacial across the Labrador-Iceland-England land-bridge, overran a long, terraced, and cultivated island on the Central Ridge where they found a grain-raising "Peoples of the Sea" who were part of a great world-encircling colossus of antiquity? The tall, disharmonics with their red skin and eagle feathers subdued the island-kingdom, left some of their hunter-artist leaders in charge, and pressed on into the rich plains of Europe, where they fell upon and destroyed the Neanderthal Race, driving the last refugees across the Mediterranean Valley into Africa.

When the return of the glacial, isolated the island-kingdom once more, the two physical types mingled and the culture and burial rites became the result of millenniums of intermarriage. Thus when the second interglacial, and the changing water-levels of the ocean, together with the now rapidly widening Atlantic caused the island-kingdom to break up into a few smaller islands, waves of these peoples now known to us as Azilians, invaded Europe and Africa, mingling with the people already found in those lands. From here the invasion swept on into the Mediterranean and into Australia, carrying the first, or perhaps even the second wave of feather-culture.

The greatest difficulty is met with in trying to square the Azilian invasion of Spain with the earlier invasion of Bushman territory, that is, if we would make use of Neanderthal culture as a measuring stick. Perhaps the earlier invasion of Azilian culture, and the overlying Neanderthal in Bushman territory may be explained by a homeland on the sunken portion of the Spanish-North African shelf, which was rising off about this time, and deteriorating under the rising sea-level of the returning interglacial, thus forcing repeated invasions of the nearest dry land.

Yet the mystery of the Azilian, and the preceding Aurignacian is no more profound than the "Kitchen Midden" people. These lake and sea-coast dwellers who built their villages upon posts in the water and left heaps of shells behind as a permanent memorial of their residence, are of the same physical type as the Azilian—slight long-head harmonics. Yet the distribution of



Map illustrating how the distribution of the long-headed harmonic and disharmonic races bear out the Taylor-Wegner Drift theory if the continents are returned to the places which, according to that theory, they occupied during the Pleistocene. 1, Present shelf. 2, Indication of earlier shelf.—Compiled by author from Daly, Wegner, Challenger Exped. and Huxley.

these ancient kitchen refuse heaps afford much food for thought. They are located in Switzerland, the Baltic, Norway, Japan, Sardinia, Chili, Patagonia, North America, Brazil and Egypt. Possibly that is a coincidence. Possibly it is also a coincidence that near most of them are flint mines with horizontal drifts which have "work-shops" in the margins and evidence that they were worked with bone picks. Furthermore, it may be coincidence that most of them supply so many bones of the pig, dog, ox and deer that many scientists have suggested that these animals were domesticated by them.

When we study a map of these collective long-head invasions and migrations, it is seen to present a distinct pattern, though the significance of it probably continues to escape us because of our ignorance of what might lie upon the sunken plateaus of continental rocks over which the present oceans are rolling. Yet when we realize that most, if not all of the great migrations of peoples can be traced to some physical cause which in turn, prompted a series of people-displacements like the reverberating echoes of a distant explosion, it will be seen how closely the history of mankind is related to the land upon which he is living. Thus the entire Pleistocene, being a time of unstable sea-level, and continually changing climate, as the ice-pendulum swung the regions of rain-forest and desert back and forth across the face of the earth, was also a time of human catastrophe-forced migrations from the perils of draught and flood.

Thus if we grant a background of the Taylor-Wegner Theory, in which we have a much narrower Atlantic Ocean during the time of the Pleistocene, with some portions of the Central Ridge still small habitable cultural-centers, similar to the present islands of England and Japan, the hock of long-head distribution begins to have a new significance. Yet the very early knowledge and use of some type of ocean-going migration-boat must also be granted, especially by the harmonic long-head.

However, if we deny these possibilities, and cling to the old-fashioned geology of stable continents and oceans, then we must explain the greater mystery of long-head distribution in its world-wide aspect, and the little "islands" of peoples where the type is still to be found. And we must explain not only why the skull-type has persisted in spite of untold millenniums of mixture, but why these "islands" are to be found only in the highlands bordering great rivers, or upon the seacoasts of widely-separated continents.

It is between the horns of this dilemma that the arguments of our geologists are thundering.

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DISCUSSIONS



AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

HE HAS SEEN BETTER!

Sirs:

Your December issue was very good, but *I have* seen better. Here is my rating on the stories:

1. "Warrior of the Dawn." It's almost like old times, with a story like this. Only, please, don't do any more serials. Between parts, interest lags.

2. "World of a Thousand Moons." Fair, but could be better.

3. "The Time Mirror." A new, different twist to a time story. Clark South is going places. More!

4. "Planet of the Gods." Very good.

5. "One Way Ticket to Nowhere." Written well. But poor plot.

6. I intensely dislike Dwight V. Swain's character Henry Horn.

7. "The Sphere of Sleep" was fair.

8. "Monsoons of Death." Well written.

Here are a few suggestions: 1, Accurate illustrations. 2, Burroughs, and more Burroughs. 3, No serials.

FRANK MURPHY,
323—86 Street
Brooklyn, N. Y.

For a guy that's seen better, Frank, you sound kind of fond of our December issue! South, Williams, Yerxa and Browne are drawing down a flock of "raves" over their stories in it. And your cry for more Burroughs has not gone unheeded, as witness the lead yarn in this issue.—Ed.

BUT IS IT AMAZING?

Sirs:

Too much praise is bad for any mag. But then again I can't throw brickbats where they are not needed. There is one thing that bothers me though. I notice that you have gradually changed over to serials, novels, etc. You should have at least 4 shorts and 5 or 6 longer stories in your mag considering the size. And now I come to the main part of this letter, the stories, features, and the illustrations.

"Warrior of the Dawn" was an excellent story. (Part I) It was crammed full of action from start to finish. It belonged in F.A. though. There wasn't a speck of science in it. It's possible though that the second half will yield a little science. Correct me if I'm wrong. Hamilton came through

with his usual brilliant finesse and vivid scene weaving story. The old master still has his touch. Yerxa, Williams, and Swain also came through for average yarns. Yerxa is going like a ball of fire. The rest were fair. On the whole the issue was fairly good. The first really GOOD issue in a long time.

Might I enquire what your going to feature on your back cover next? Or is it a military secret? I like but 3 of your features, The Observatory, Meet the Author, and Discussions. (More letters please).

The illustrations rated 80%. And brother that's saying a mouthful. The front cover was excellent. Back cover—check. The tops for the inner illustrations this issue were: J. Allen St. John, Fuqua, and Hadley. Jay Jackson's work in this issue was much better than his usual mess of lines and angles. Definitely an improvement. I take back anything I've ever said about Hadley. He did an excellent job. Magarian and Smith obviously fell down on this issue. Which was a surprise in itself. In fact the whole issue was a surprise. Is L. Raymond Jones going to do any work for A.S. any more? I hope not.

I'd like to inform the gentleman from Copalis Beach that "Battering Rams of Space" was a sequel to "Slave Raiders of Mercury" or, "Slave Raiders From Mercury." How about it Wilcox? How about a sequel to the sequel?

RICHARD HIRSCHFELD,
1921 Fulton St.,
San Francisco, Calif.

Personally, we've always figured that the Cro-Magnards were pretty amazing folks! And we think you'll agree the lead character did some amazing things, even without gadgets! Paul and Settles will alternate on back covers for a while. We'd like a comment from you on St. John's cover for this month.—Ed.

"WANTS"—PRO AND CON

Sirs:

It's been a long time since I wrote to any s-f magazine's Reader's Department, but I thought it was time to tell you that AMAZING STORIES is still tops.

Here are a few of my "wants": Another "Mac girl" cover; more Robert Bloch in AMAZING; more

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of this guy, Emil Petaja (By the way, who is he, anyway? That "Dinosaur Goes Hollywood" story sure was a wow!)

As for things I don't want—well, no serials, for one thing. They keep me biting my nails off. Also, don't cut AMAZING down, not so much as a page!

HAL HELLAND,
4534 Bagley Ave.,
Seattle, Wash.

Petaja is a comparative newcomer, but we expect you'll see more of him. McCauley did the December cover for Fantastic Adventures, and which has drawn more than favorable comment. Opinion on serials is divided, so we try to please both groups.—Ed.

PURE ADVENTURE

Sirs:

Like every issue of AMAZING there has to be one over-rated story—meaning "Warrior of the Dawn." This story was pure adventure—not S-F. This type of story belongs in F.A.

1. "World of a Thousand Moons" was the best story in this ish.
 2. "Planet of the Gods" runs a very close second. These two stories were both excellent.
 3. "The Sphere of Sleep" a pretty darn good short story.
 4. "One Way Ticket to Nowhere" and "The Time Mirror" take fourth place.
 5. "Warrior of the Dawn"—if you like adventure, the best story of the year.
 6. "Monsoons of Death."
 7. "Henry Horn's X-Ray Eye Glasses."
- The front cover was good though it wasn't science fiction.

Back cover was another improvement. Keep it up, Scattles.

The issue contained a host of swell illustrations. Ned Hadley, Magarian and Malcolm Smith were at their best in this ish.

I like your idea of reprinting the "New Adam." Get all the Weinbaum stories you can for your reprint department.

If possible please reprint the "Skylark" series by E. E. Smith.

THOMAS REGAN, JR.,
138 Townsend Street,
New Brunswick, N. J.

You confuse us somewhat, Tom. We have trouble in reconciling the two statements that (1) "Warrior of the Dawn" was badly over-rated, and (2) was the best story of the year. Of course, your qualifying adjective "adventure" helps clarify the paradox. Weinbaum's "The New Adam" starts in this issue and we'd like your reaction. Future issues of both AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES will feature other classics of the same stature. Smith's "Skylark" series is given lengthy mention in another letter and comment in on adjoining column.—Ed.

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STORIES of the STARS

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Canis Major, The Great Dog

**From early times Man's imagination stretched out to the stars
and he gave names and characters to the most brilliant groups**

THIS glorious constellation hardly needs description. Its head is the Dog Star, *Sirius*, beyond all comparison, the brightest star in the heavens. *Sirius* is one of our nearer neighbors, as interstellar distances go, being only something less than nine light years away from us. It can almost be pointed at by a line drawn through Orion's belt, which is composed of three stars. *Beta*, in the extremity of the uplifted paw, is a second magnitude star, and so are several of the stars further south in the rump and tail of the animal who sits up watching his master, Orion, but with one eye cocked on *Lepus*, the Rabbit.

Although it is generally believed that the constellation was named by the Greeks, this is far from the truth. Hardly anything so well-known today as the constellations is older in origin. Euphratean cuneiforms bear direct reference to constellation designations which can be traced to the Greek appellations. Many of them are Semitic and pre-Semitic in origin, but these in turn can be traced back to the Sumerians and Accadians, who inhabited the Euphrates valley prior to the Babylonians. Stone tablets of the Sumerians and Accadians describe a series of thirty-six constellations (twelve northern, twelve zodiacal, and twelve southern) and these tablets are dated from 3,000 B. C. to 500 B. C.

Some authorities are inclined to believe that designations of the constellations date even earlier in history, or rather in unrecorded history, to a race which possessed a great civilization which has entirely vanished except for these stellar names. The indication here is that the stars held some special interest to this probable race, insofar that even travel between the stars was possible and actually accomplished. Perhaps that incredibly ancient civilization was even of other-world origin.

In legend, the Great Dog was the warrior companion of Orion, greatest warrior of them all. Greek legend tells of Orion as a Greek figure, descendant of Greek Gods, but Orion and his dog appear in the Accadian tablets under other and untranslatable names. It is possible that originally Orion was a hero of a race whose very memory is erased from the mind of Man.

Whoever he was, it is certain he was a great fighter, and owed a great deal of his fame to the dog who was his constant companion and

assistant in battle.

Although legend tells of the death of Orion, there is no mention of what happened to his dog. Prevalent belief is that when Orion took his place among the stars, the Great Dog followed him in loyalty and devotion and bridged the gap between life and death without dying so that he could accompany his master on his ceaseless march through the heavens.

In adding imagination to the back cover painting illustrating the constellation, *Canis Major*, artist Frank R. Paul has pictured one of the planets which may revolve around *Sirius*, head of the Great Dog. In imagination he has brought an Earth space ship to the new world, bearing two Earth people.

Since *Sirius* is a colossal star, the planet our travelers have landed on is a huge world peopled by thirty-foot giants. The developments of these giant people has been depicted as mechanically scientific. Tremendous structures and machines have been built to conquer their giant world and we see one of the huge machines at work in this painting.

It is a giant "harvesting" machine which carves out great blocks of a peat-like material rich in oil. This great world was covered with jungle growth for many millions of years, and these peat deposits are incredibly thick.

The science of the Sirians has enabled them to extract power, fuel, food, and building material from the exotic substance. Under pressure, the oil is extracted, to be converted into hundreds of chemical substances ranging from fuel for the giant machines to complex medicinal compounds. Many by-products of the pulp are converted into foods, and the remaining pulp can be converted into fuel and building material. All sorts of plastics are made from this "pulp" by treatment of various kinds, from transparent unbreakable glass to marbles and stones and crystals of great beauty and texture.

The Sirians have been pictured by Paul as having been successful in combating the gravity pull of a world so vast as theirs, so that visiting Earthmen encounter no more gravity than on their own world. Tremendous generators draw power from *Sirius* and convert it into energy which meets and neutralizes the desired proportion of the mysterious energy we call gravity. Perhaps artist Paul isn't far from right!

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Robert E. Roach, 1252 W. 80th St., Chicago, Ill., has many magazine copies featuring most of A. Merritt's stories for sale at reasonable prices. . . . Robert Kalanja, 421 Duquesne Ave., Trafford, Pa., has coins, stamps, books, fossils, chemicals and scientific equipment, Indian relics and magazines to trade for books, fiction or science. He would also like to correspond with boys and girls between the ages of 17 and 20 . . . Anyone interested in psychic research write to Charles Miller, 202 E. 115 Street, New York City, or to Bill Caple, 412 N. School St., Calif., and he will receive a copy of "Psychic Research" free. Just enclose a three cent stamp for mailing. Paper contains articles on Spiritualism, Telepathy, Clairvoyance, Etc. . . . Roger Hendricks, State Hospital, Morganton, N. C., would like to hear from readers having back numbers of S-F mags to dispose of and the stories and poems of Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, and the poems of Cristel Hastings and Edgar Daniel Kramer . . . Elizabeth King, 722 Forest, Ann Arbor, Mich., would like to write to anyone remotely resembling her idol, Maxie Baer, and who is interested in prize fighting . . . Renée Dunoff, 763 Crown St., Brooklyn, N. Y., 17 years old, would like to correspond with young men. She enjoys sports, dancing, and reading . . . Philip Sturm, Jr., 714 W. Dickens Ave., Chicago, Ill., has AMAZING and FANTASTIC stories from several years back that he would like to sell. He also has other science-fiction magazines . . . Tom Arnold, 1700 Hickory St., Texarkana, Ark., would like to play corresponding chess with any one interested. He would also like to sell a silent home movie machine, films, an almost new photography set worth \$10.00, and a complete set of Jerry Todd Books. . . . Ludile Kraft, age 15, R.F.D. 5, Allegan, Michigan, would like to correspond with boys and girls her age or older . . . Eddy Morilla, Gervasio 10F, Havana, Cuba, Cuban, age 17, wants young pen pals anywhere, interested in everything. Write in Spanish, English, French, Portuguese or Esperanto. Immediate answers . . . Mary Senchiesen, 33 St. Michaels Ave., Stratford, Conn., would like to correspond with men in service. She is 23 years old . . . Corp. Eli A. Homza, Company "G," Fifteenth Signal Service Regiment, Fort Monmouth, N. J., wants girl pen pals for correspondence . . . Joe Vallin, 5809 33rd St., Washington, D. C., has the following books for sale: "At the Earth's Core," "Tarzan Lord of the Jungle," "Pirates of Venus," "Land of Hidden Men," and "The Triumph of Tarzan." . . . Shirley Beckers, Route No. 2, Allegan, Mich., would like to correspond with anyone from 16 to 22, especially anyone in the armed service . . . Ann Mallisek, 286 Beach St., Bridgeport, Conn., 16 years old, would like young men in the service to write to her . . . George C. Bump, 4116 Terrace St., Oakland, Calif., wants pen pals.

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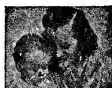
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STORIES OF THE STARS... **CANUS MAJOR**

The most glorious constellation in the heavens, the Great Dog.
Sirius, brightest of stars, is part of this constellation (story on page 238)



Another scan
by
cape1736

